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Frank T. Merrill

"SHE BEHELD A STRANGE FIGURE"
Photogravure from original by Merrill

"SHE BEHELD A STRANGE FIGURE"

Photogravure from original by Merrill

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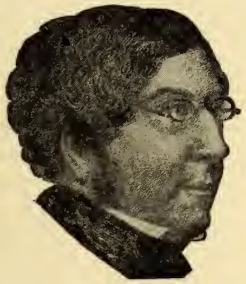
The Works of

George W. M. Reynolds

The Fortunes of the Ashtons

Volume V

The Mysteries of the Court of London



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CHAPTER I

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

We must now take a temporary leave of the strolling players, and return to the prison whence De Margaux had escaped.

Finette, it will be remembered, had thrown herself in a state of distraction upon the prostrate and inanimate form of her sire, whom she believed to have been killed by the violence with which he was hurled to the ground. He however speedily showed signs of life, and thus a tremendous weight was lifted from the mind of the unfortunate Finette. The alarm raised by the turnkey immediately previous to his struggle with De Margaux had reached the ears of his brother doorkeepers inside the prison, as well as of the sentinel who paced in front of it. Several persons therefore were soon upon the spot where the conflict had taken place, and where the drugged soldier still lay senseless, while Finette's father was coming back to consciousness. The fact that De Margaux had escaped was quickly made known; a pursuit was instituted in every direction, and a printing-press in the town was promptly set to work to turn out bills and placards offering a reward for his capture. A mounted police officer passed through the very village in the neighbourhood of which De Margaux was at the time making friends with the strollers, but the constable was assured that no person at all answering the felon's descriptions had been seen in the place.

Meanwhile the drugged sentinel was restored to conscious-

ness, and the luckless Finette, amidst torrents of tears and agonized appeals for pardon, confessed all the details of her connivance in the prisoner's escape. By her father she was overwhelmed with reproaches; the sentinel to whom she had given the drugged brandy upbraided her with an almost equal bitterness; her sire's brother turnkeys were scarcely less warm in the expression of their sentiments. The unhappy girl was quickly rescued from her infatuation with reference to De Margaux. She now learned that he himself was in reality a murderer, — that there could be no possible mistake on the subject, for that Dame Roquette had that very evening made the fullest and most ample revelations to the gaol chaplain. The conviction was forced upon Finette, too, that De Margaux was an accomplished deceiver, that his tales of buried treasure and of an Alpine villa were all utterly false, and that he had imposed upon her credulity in every possible way in order to further his own ends. The girl was plunged into the very abyss of mental wretchedness; she was shocked at her own foolish infatuation, and being far from deficient in good principle at the bottom of all her giddiness, she was ready to die with shame, as well as to sink beneath the upbraidings of those by whom she was surrounded.

It was necessary to make an immediate report to the governor of the gaol, who at the time was sleeping soundly in his bed, and this functionary was seized with a violent rage. Finette's father had obtained a half-holiday on the understanding that he was to return to his quarters at eight o'clock that evening; his dereliction of duty was therefore discovered, and the governor failed not to reproach him with the fact that if he had adhered to the rules of the prison his daughter could not have found an opportunity to carry out her designs. The consequence was that in the morning Finette's father received his dismissal, accompanied with an intimation on the part of the police that he had better get out of the town with the least possible delay if he were desirous to avoid a still more rigorous chastisement.

This hurricane of calamities well-nigh broke poor Finette's heart. Her aunt, to whom a flying visit was paid as she accompanied her father from the town, read her the severest lecture for the mingled folly and wickedness of which she had been guilty, and positively refused to give her an asylum while

her father sought for employment elsewhere. The ex-turnkey was accordingly compelled to take his daughter with him, and as he had a brother who was comfortably settled as a draper in a town about eighty miles distant, he resolved to proceed thither, in the hope that something might be done for him. He possessed some little savings, to the extent of eighteen or twenty pounds, speaking in English money, and thus he was not as yet compelled to look absolute poverty in the face.

In the *rotonde*, or cheapest part of the diligence (stage-coach), the ex-turnkey and Finette took their places for the town to which we have just alluded. Unfortunately for the poor girl, they were the only travellers in that division of the vehicle, and thus her father failed not to continue his upbraidings as they journeyed onward. Finette wept bitterly; she over and over again avowed all her folly and wickedness, and besought her sire's pardon. But he was one of those men who could not be very easily appeased, and who in any case must give the fullest vent to their ill-humour before the word "pardon" could possibly escape their lips. At length the ex-turnkey talked himself off to sleep, and Finette sat pensive and miserable, looking listlessly from the window of the diligence.

At one of the post-houses where the coach stopped to change horses, and while her father continued to sleep soundly, Finette's eyes settled upon a placard posted against the wall immediately opposite the window of the diligence. She beheld the name of De Margaux. She read the placard; it offered a reward of a thousand francs (forty pounds sterling) for the apprehension of the escaped prisoner. The contents of this bill put Finette's feelings to a new and final test; such an impulse was given to her thoughts that she now unmistakably comprehended whether there were any lingering remnant of the late infatuation in her soul, or whether her love had turned to hatred. She understood likewise whether, if De Margaux suddenly appeared before her, even with veritable proofs of his buried treasure and of his Alpine villa, she would flee away with him to share his riches, or whether she would remain with her sire, to endure his upbraidings as often as the humour for venting them might take possession of him.

The diligence continued its way, and Finette shed no

more tears, but remained plunged in deep and gloomy meditation until her father woke up and renewed his reproaches. Finette listened to them in silence; she no longer entreated his forgiveness, — there was even something dull and apathetic in the appearance of the young girl. Her father deemed her indifferent to the calamities which had overtaken him, and he redoubled his upbraidings. Still Finette said nothing, and again did the ex-turnkey talk till he was tired, so that relapsing into slumber, he slept for the last three or four hours of the journey.

The night was setting in when the diligence entered the town which was the destination of Finette and her father. It was too late for them to call on their relation until the morrow, and they therefore took up their quarters at a small inn, or, rather, public house, in the neighbourhood of the office where the coach stopped. In the morning the ex-turnkey set out to proceed alone, in the first instance, to his brother's; but on arriving at the house he found that its master had gone on the preceding day to Paris, where he was likely to be detained for a week. The draper was an unmarried man, and had left his little establishment in the charge of a clerk, so that the ex-turnkey could not even obtain an asylum at the house until his brother's return. As the reader may suppose, he retraced his way to the tavern in no very enviable humour, and fully prepared to vent all his vexation upon the head of poor Finette.

The young girl still bore her sire's treatment in uncomplaining silence, and with an air of dull and listless apathy. He resolved to remain at the public-house until his brother should return, and thus a week went by. During this interval Finette was most attentive to her father in all the ministrations which as a daughter she could display, but she never once answered him when he reproached her, nor did she again beseech his forgiveness. He began to think that he had mistaken her disposition, that she was not really indifferent nor apathetic, but that her spirit was broken. He therefore thought that he had said enough to her — probably too much; and he suddenly desisted from his upbraidings, though he was of too dogged and morose a nature to volunteer the pardon which was now no longer asked.

The brother returned from Paris, having experienced

a considerable pecuniary loss by the business which had taken him hither. He himself was of a rugged and unfeeling disposition, devoted to money-grubbing pursuits; he showed no inclination to assist his brother with his purse, though he was ready enough to proffer his counsel, and likewise to lecture Finette severely for her own misconduct. He somewhat churlishly said that his relations might stay with him for a short time, until they could settle themselves in some manner; and thus they shifted their quarters to his house from the tavern where they had been staying. Finette's father had in the meanwhile been looking about for some employment, but he could find nothing that suited him. There was a shop doing a good little business to be disposed of, and it was in a trade which the ex-turnkey and his daughter could manage, but the purchase-money was fifty pounds, and Finette's father had only about fifteen left. His brother would not advance him a single franc, and thus he found himself compelled to renounce the hope of obtaining a business which would have afforded him a better livelihood than even that post of turnkey from which he had so lately been discharged.

One afternoon, about ten days after the arrival of Finette and her father in the town of which we are speaking, the young damsel strolled forth in a very disconsolate mood. Feeling that her parent and herself were regarded as a burden upon the means of her avaricious uncle, she longed to use her own industry for the purpose of earning something. She had on the previous day applied in various quarters for needlework, but without being enabled to obtain it. She now renewed her applications, but still without success. At two or three warehouses which she entered she experienced overtures on the part of insolent clerks or masters which brought the blood up to her cheeks, and on one occasion so gross was the insult she received she burst into tears and went weeping along the street. Perceiving that she was the object of attention with the passers-by, and unable to restrain her sobs, she issued out of the town toward a grove which bounded it in that particular direction. There she sat down upon a bank where some autumnal flowers bespangled the grass, and wiping away her tears, she fell into a profound reverie.

We have already said that Finette was exceedingly pretty,

and it was distressing to think that a young girl endowed with so many personal charms, and whose errors had been those of the head rather than of the mind, should now experience so much deep affliction. But thus it was. She felt that her father was almost ruined, and she reproached herself as the cause. Apart however from these self-upbraidings, there was something brooding in her mind, — an idea which for several days past she had riveted her attention upon, an idea which she longed to carry out, but for which purpose she knew not the means.

Finette had been seated for perhaps about half an hour on that flower-bespangled bank, embowered amidst the verdure of the grove, when she heard footsteps approaching, and looking up, she beheld a strange figure. It was a tall man, with his face clean-shaven, wearing an ample brown wig, indifferently frizzed, and surmounted by a hat with slouching brims. His apparel was of the very shabbiest description, and scarcely seemed to have been originally made for him. His linen was far from the cleanest, and altogether he looked not one who might be classed amongst the number of fortune's favourites. We need hardly inform the reader that this was none other than De Margaux. The troupe of strolling players had arrived in the town that very morning, and were to exhibit themselves at the theatre in the evening. De Margaux, who took no share in the stage-performances, but only managed to render himself useful behind the scenes, was invariably accustomed to seek as much privacy as possible during the daytime, for fear lest at any town where they stopped he might encounter an officer sufficiently lynx-eyed to penetrate through his disguise. Thus, on the present occasion, he had left his companions at the tavern where they put up, and quitting the town, he had sought the grove with the intention of plunging into its depths and reposing himself until the shades of evening closed in. While threading his way into the midst of the wood, he beheld a female seated upon a bank, and before she herself had raised her countenance, he had recognized Finette.

It immediately struck De Margaux that the young girl had either been compelled by circumstances or else prompted by her infuatation to abandon her home and launch herself forth in the world in search of him. His natural pride

and conceit engendered this belief in a moment, and in other respects it was certainly natural enough, when he found her so far from her native place, — the more especially as it never struck De Margaux that her father might have lost his situation through his daughter's imprudence. He did not, however, immediately advance toward her; he stood still for a few moments to see if she recognized him. But after simply glancing at De Margaux, Finette averted her eyes; she had not the remotest suspicion that in the comparatively miserable object before her she beheld the handsome, elegant-mannered, fascinating individual who for several hours had obtained over her heart a degree of influence such as in ordinary cases an acquaintance of months and years could scarcely have engendered.

De Margaux looked around; Finette was evidently alone. She had relapsed into her gloomy reverie, she was apparently in a distressed state of mind. De Margaux therefore felt convinced that she was a wanderer, either voluntary or outcast, from the paternal home, and touched by her exceeding beauty, of which he had retained a vivid impression, though not one particle of real love did he experience for her, he longed to possess her as a mistress.

Approaching her, he said, in the most harmonious accents of his naturally fine voice, " Finette, do you not know me? "

For an instant the young damsel started as if suddenly stung by a serpent lurking amidst the grass whereon she sat, and her dark eyes swept their looks hastily over De Margaux's form. At the same time an expression, which appeared to be that of terror, flitted across her features, but it was instantaneously succeeded by a smile, and springing up from her seat, she ejaculated, with an air of mingled astonishment and joy, " Good heavens, sir, is it you? "

" Yes, dearest Finette," responded De Margaux, " it is I, who have never ceased to love you," and he threw his arm around her waist.

" Oh, if this were true! " she ejaculated, quickly disengaging herself, and springing back a pace or two as if for the purpose of studying his countenance well, that she might know whether she dared confide in him.

" Yes, Finette, it is true," exclaimed De Margaux. " Tell me, does the assurance give you pleasure? Have you been looking for me? "

"Yes," cried the young damsel, giving an affirmative in her turn. "Oh, I have wandered and wandered so far and so wearily!"

"It is, then, as I thought," cried De Margaux. "You were not angry with me, Finette, that I fled so precipitately on that memorable night?"

"Angry with you?" she ejaculated. "Oh, no! In one sense I rejoiced that you succeeded in effecting your escape, though in another sense I was very, very sad."

"Ah, I comprehend you, dearest Finette!" said the villain, assuming a look of the deepest tenderness, while he took her hand which she abandoned to him. "You were sad because I was compelled to fly alone and that you were unable to accompany me? Ah! my dear Finette, I have been truly wretched on your account. I have pictured to myself all kinds of horrors, — your father's indignation, his brutal treatment of you — "

"I remained not to encounter it," answered Finette. "He would have killed me if I had stayed. I fled from home, I have wandered about — "

"And you confess, dearest girl, that you entertained the hope of falling in with me?" said De Margaux.

"Oh," exclaimed Finette, her countenance lighting up with a sudden animation, "if I had not entertained this hope, I could not have supported myself under the sense of such terrible calamities. Yes, oh, yes, I have longed to fall in with you."

"Dear, dear Finette!" and De Margaux strained her to his breast. "Dearest Finette, how I love you!"

"But you?" she said, again disengaging herself from his arms, "were you veritably and truly happy thus to fall in with me?"

"Can you possibly doubt it?" exclaimed De Margaux. "Shall I tell you wherefore I assumed this disguise? It was not so much to assist in eventually effecting my escape from the pursuit set after me as to carry out a desperate purpose which I had formed. It was my intention to dare everything on your account, to retrace my way, yes, at any risk, no matter how great — "

"Oh, then, you really love me?" cried Finette, a joyous expression appearing upon her countenance, "and you were coming in search of me?"

" Yes. And now that we have met, dearest one," said De Margaux, " it shall be to part no more. Will you not give me a similar assurance? "

Finette looked up with her beautiful black eyes into the villain's countenance for a moment; then she suddenly cast her glances downward, and while a blush suffused her cheeks, she murmured, " But you will make me your wife? "

" Oh, assuredly! " exclaimed De Margaux. " I will fulfil every promise I made to you at the time. Ah, by the bye, did those people at the goal endeavour to set you against me? Did they vilify me in your hearing? Did they — "

" My feelings were too bewildered with mingled joy and grief, as I have already explained to you," answered Finette, " to enable me to attend to anything which was said at the time. The rest of that night I passed at our quarters in the prison; but very early in the morning I gathered together my few jewels and my little savings, — three or four hundred francs, — and I fled."

" And those jewels, and those savings? " said De Margaux, inwardly chuckling at the intelligence he had just received, and resolving to cut the society of the strolling players with the least possible delay, in order to make Finette his sole companion.

" My jewels and my money," responded the young damsel, " are at a little lodging which I have taken in the town. Oh, I have been very economical, I can assure you, for I did not know how long it might be before — "

" Before you and I encountered each other again? " said De Margaux, — " is it not so? Ah, that telltale blush, my sweet Finette! Well, you have husbanded your resources, and it is so much the better. We will fly away together at once. We will proceed into Switzerland, and there the priest shall join our hands in marriage. When will you come, dearest? When will you be ready to set off? "

" Oh, if I thought you would be always kind and good to me," said Finette, " that you would always speak as gently and as fondly as you are speaking now — "

" Can you possibly distrust me? Can you doubt my love? " asked De Margaux, taking her hand and gazing

with passion upon her countenance, but with a passion most sensuously different from that which his words appeared to express.

"I believe you, oh, I believe you!" exclaimed Finette. "It will take me an hour to complete my little preparations."

"And then you will rejoin me?" cried De Margaux. "And where is there a better spot for our next meeting than this very one where we have been so happily brought together? I will await you here, Finette. Need I hint, dearest girl, at the necessity of observing the utmost caution? You will not breathe a syllable to a soul."

"Oh, rest assured," exclaimed the young damsel, "that all my precautions shall be taken with the most careful regard as to the result. And now farewell for the present. You will be sure to meet me here —"

"And you, Finette, will be sure to come?"

"Within the hour that is passing," she rejoined, and giving him her hand for a moment, she glided away from his presence.

Finette issued from the wood, and sped back into the town. On arriving at her uncle's house, she found her father sitting in a gloomy mood in the parlour, up-stairs, above the shop.

"Where have you been, Finette?" he angrily demanded, for through vexation and disappointment all his irritable feelings had suddenly revived against his daughter. "I will not have you wandering about by yourself; you will get into mischief, and even worse things will happen to you than what has already taken place."

"No, father, never!" exclaimed Finette, vehemently.

"Then if you mean to keep yourself steady and respectable for the future," continued her sire, "you would do well to look out for some employment or else for a situation. I cannot keep you in idleness. I mean to take a situation myself, however humble it may be, for I will not live as a burden upon your uncle, who seems to grudge us every morsel of food we put into our mouths. Oh, Finette, you have been my ruin!"

"Say not so, father. And yet it is too true. Relative to that shop which you thought of taking —"

"Nonsense, the shop!" vociferated the ex-turnkey.

" You know that I have not the means, and it is just the same as if you were throwing my poverty in my teeth."

" But is it not possible," proceeded Finette, " to raise by any means what you require? "

" Ah! if I could make a thousand stones into as many francs," exclaimed the ex-turnkey, with morose bitterness, " I might enter in possession of the shop to-morrow. But as it is, that idea is all vain. And now, Finette — "

" Father," she interrupted him, at the same time gazing on his countenance with a peculiar significancy, " will you follow my instructions? — I mean, will you act according to the advice I am about to give you? "

" Why, what does the girl mean? " exclaimed her sire, thinking for a moment that her intellects were affected.

" You must ask me no questions, but do as I suggest," and there was something in the damsel's look and manner which induced her father to attend very seriously to the words she was about to speak.

" What am I to do, Finette? " he inquired.

" Procure a stout cord," she replied, " and in half an hour come to the verge of that grove which you perceive at the extremity of this long street. Do not penetrate into the grove until you hear me call you."

" What child's play is this? " demanded the ex-turnkey, angrily. " I thought you were going to tell me of some means whereby to obtain employment, and which had perhaps accidentally come to your knowledge."

" It is a simple thing, father, which I ask you to do," responded Finette, " and you will not be long ere you learn my object. I do not think that you will then be angry. You must know, dear father, that, whatever my faults, I am incapable of making you the object of a jest."

" Well then, Finette, I will act according to your bidding. A stout cord, you say, and I am to remain on the outskirt of the grove until you summon me into its depths? I cannot for the life of me conceive — "

" Father, I will give you no explanations now," interrupted the damsel. " Do what I have said, and you will thank me. Fail, and you will be sorry."

Without waiting for any response, Finette hurried from the room. She proceeded to her own chamber, where she packed a number of articles in a tolerably large market-

basket, and slinging this to her arm she again went forth from the house. Proceeding straight to a tavern, she purchased a bottle of wine, which she placed in her basket. She thence repaired to a chemist's, at whose establishment she bought some fluid drug, and having also consigned the phial to her basket, she continued her way. On emerging from the town, she stopped in a sheltered place, a sort of open shed, and there she remained for a few minutes, while she poured forth a portion of the wine and filled up the bottle with the contents of the phial procurred at the chemist's. She then sped to the grove, and plunging into its depths, found De Margaux anxiously expecting her arrival.

"You are come, dearest Finette!" he exclaimed, springing forward to receive her, "and all your preparations are complete," he added, glancing at the basket.

"Yes," she replied. "I have not kept you long in suspense. But whither are we to go, in which direction are we to bend our way, and how are we to travel?"

"It depends, dear girl," said De Margaux, "on the extent of our resources. To speak frankly, I am utterly denuded of funds until we reach Switzerland, and there — But methought you spoke of a few hundred francs?"

"Yes," rejoined Finette; and then, with an air of ingenuousness, she asked, "Will such a sum suffice to take us into Switzerland?"

"To be sure!" exclaimed De Margaux; and, greedily anxious to ascertain the amount which, through the medium of Finette, he thought himself able to command, he added, "But let us ascertain precisely the state of our finances. Come, let us sit down for a few minutes, and we will deliberate on our plans."

The damsel sat down accordingly, and De Margaux placed himself by her side. Holding the basket in her lap, she opened it, as if about to produce her money and jewels; and lest the mention of jewels in respect to a French turnkey's daughter should appear strange to the English reader, we may as well observe that there are few females of the humbler class in France who do not possess their trinkets of this description.

"Ah, what have you there?" exclaimed De Margaux, who, the instant the basket was opened, caught sight of the bottle which was lying on the top of all the other arti-

cles that Finette had packed together ere leaving the house.

"It is a bottle of wine which I have purchased for our refreshment," responded Finette, "for I knew not whether we should have to journey on foot — "

"Nothing could come more acceptably," exclaimed De Margaux, "for I am suffocating with thirst."

"Oh, how glad I am," cried Finette, with an expression of joy upon her countenance, "that I should have had this forethought!"

Thus speaking, she took out the bottle from the basket, and handed it to De Margaux.

"I am afraid it is only poor wine," observed Finette, "for I did not like to be too extravagant."

"Right, dear girl," said De Margaux. "I have no doubt it will be good enough for me to celebrate in a long draught this happy meeting which has restored us to each other."

With these words De Margaux applied the bottle to his lips, and being in reality sore athirst at the time, he imbibed a considerable quantity. Finette watched him with a singular expression of countenance, eager suspense being mingled with terror, until all in a moment the bottle fell from his hand, and the remainder of its contents poured forth upon the grass. Finette sprang up to her feet, and darted back a few paces as if to place herself at such a distance that the villain should not be enabled to do her a mischief. A fiendlike expression suddenly took possession of his countenance; he strove to rise from the bank, but he could not, and with the words, "Wretch! treachery!" upon his lips, he sank helplessly back against a tree.

"Ah, it is the lesson which you taught me!" exclaimed Finette, and then she cried out, "Father, father, come!"

In a few moments the rapid approach of some one through the wood reached the damsel's ears, and her sire was quickly upon the spot. He beheld an unconscious form lying upon the bank; the first idea which struck him was that the man was dead, and with a look full of horrified alarm, he glanced toward his daughter.

"He is not dead, father," said Finette; "he is only as that sentinel was the other night on the verge of the moat. The lesson he has taught me — "

"What, Finette?" ejaculated her father, as a light flashed

in unto his mind, "is it possible? But no! What does it all mean? This is not — "

"Yes, father," said the damsel, quietly, "this is De Margaux. Bind him, he is your prisoner. You alone have captured him; there is none to dispute your right to the reward, nor to demand a share of it. And it will enable you to take possession of the shop to-morrow."

Finette's father listened in mingled astonishment and joy at these words which flowed from her lips, and he lost no time in fastening around the limbs of the unconscious De Margaux the cord which he had brought.

"Now, Finette," he exclaimed, half-wild with delight, "let me embrace thee, girl, and you shall never hear another syllable of reproach from my lips. No, you have atoned for your faults. Forsooth, after all, I am glad that it has happened. We shall be better off than ever we were."

He embraced his daughter, but she rather submitted to his caress than received it with satisfaction, and he exclaimed, "Why, what ails you, girl? You do not seem happy."

"Father," she responded, with a strange seriousness of countenance, a seriousness which even appeared to have something sinister and ominous in it, "I have done something which will for ever prevent me from knowing what happiness is in this life. I have betrayed a fellow creature to the scaffold for the sake of gold. All murderer though he be, I would not have done this were it not that I had an atonement to make unto yourself. My conduct toward that man has this day been fraught with a degree of dissimulation and treachery which, all murderer though he be, I repeat, I am utterly ashamed of, and for which I loathe myself. However, you, father, will now reproach me no more. The idea has been hovering in my mind from the very first moment that I read the placard offering a reward for that man's apprehension. It was when we were journeying in the diligence, and when I was nearly driven to madness by your reproaches. Oh, then I said to myself, 'If I could surrender him up to justice!' Ah! the idea was then vague and shadowy enough, but it has been fulfilled. It is done, father, the atonement is made, and you will be enabled to settle yourself in life. Hark! a vehicle is passing. I will return in a few moments."

With these words, Finette glided away from the presence of her sire, who was half-astonished, half-frightened at the singular language in which she had just addressed him. He was not, however, on that account inclined to abandon his prey, and he stooped down to assure himself that the cord was firmly knotted upon the limbs of the unconscious De Margaux. Meanwhile, Finette had sped into the road, where she stopped a baker's cart that was passing. Into this vehicle the still inanimate De Margaux was conveyed, and when he came back to consciousness he was the inmate of a dungeon, with chains upon his limbs.

Ere closing the present chapter, we may bring this episode to a termination. Finette's father claimed and received the reward which was offered for the apprehension of De Margaux, and he was enabled to take the shop which he had so much coveted. His business has thriven, and he is now a man well to do in the world. His daughter Finette still lives, but she is only the shadow of her former self; she is pale, thin, and wasted. She is never seen to smile, and she moves slowly and noiselessly as a ghost about her father's house when superintending the domestic arrangements. Her words spoken in the grove were indeed too prophetically true. Finette and happiness have shaken hands for ever.

The confession of Dame Roquette implicated several of the gang in the murder of the two postillions and Lord Octavian's valet. The wretches whose guilt was thus made manifest suffered along with De Margaux on the scaffold of the guillotine; Dame Roquette and the rest of the band were visited with the next severest penalties of the law, and thus justice succeeded in overtaking all the offenders who were implicated in the crimes of the forest.

CHAPTER II

THE DUKE AND HIS MISTRESS

The scene now changes to the British metropolis again, and we must introduce the reader to the interior of the house which the Duke of Marchmont had taken in a fashionable quarter for the accommodation of his mistress, Mrs. Oxenden. The reader cannot have forgotten the circumstances under which this lady had foisted, if not forced herself, upon the protection of the duke; for be it borne in mind that the power which she wielded over him was derived from the fact that she had become a listener to a certain conversation between himself and Barney the Burker on the night of the grand entertainment that was given in Belgrave Square.

The house was sumptuously furnished, and there was a large establishment of domestics. Mrs. Oxenden appeared determined to do nothing by halves. She herself went to the most fashionable silversmiths, and ordered a costly service of plate; she visited jewellers' and several other shops in a similar manner, and made her purchases as if the wealth of the Indies were at her disposal. Every one of the bills, as they were sent home in rapid succession, she enclosed to the Duke of Marchmont, with a request that they might be immediately liquidated. The duke purchased for her a very handsome equipage, consisting of a carriage and pair, but Mrs. Oxenden also required saddled horses, for she was a good equestrian, and was proud of displaying her fine figure in a riding-habit. She therefore increased her stud at the Duke of Marchmont's expense, and, in short, she appeared resolved not to deny herself anything that she set her mind upon.

Thus scarcely had a month elapsed since the date which

had given the Duke of Marchmont his new mistress before he found that he was many thousand pounds out of pocket, and that if she went on in the same expensive manner, it would be productive of serious inconveniences, notwithstanding the magnitude of the income which he enjoyed. He had foreseen from the very first that her imperious temper was likely to cause him much annoyance, and a few little examples which she had given him of her domineering disposition had shown that his presage was by no means ill-founded. He bitterly cursed the unfortunate incident which had rendered him the slave of such a connection, and he saw the necessity of asserting a will of his own if he would not have that imperious woman put her foot completely upon his neck. Although she was so exceedingly handsome, and possessed a figure of such perfectly modelled and voluptuous beauty, yet did he take no pleasure in the possession of such a mistress; there was something in her character which filled him with dread whenever he found himself in her presence, and though she was of a temperament which burned with the strongest fires of sensuous passion, yet was she deficient in those little blandishments and charming fascinations which constitute the real seductive powers of woman.

A magnificent set of diamonds valued at nearly eight thousand guineas had for some little time been exhibited at the shop of a fashionable jeweller in Bond Street. Numbers of persons belonging to the higher order had been to inspect them, and several offers were made for the purchase of the set, but the jeweller would not abate one shilling of the price which he had originally put upon the gems. Wives had endeavoured to wheedle their husbands, and young ladies their papas, into the purchase of the diamonds, but without effect. Weeks had passed since their first display, and there they remained.

At length, one afternoon, Mrs. Oxenden alighted from her splendid equipage and entered the shop to make a few purchases. She had been on the previous day attracted by something she had seen in the windows, and hence this visit. It was the first time she had patronized the particular establishment in question, and she had not heard of the diamonds that were exhibited for sale in the showroom up-stairs. The shopman who served her — fancying

from her own distinguished appearance, and from the brilliant style of her equipage, that she must be a person of some consequence — inquired whether she had seen the diamonds, and on receiving a response in the negative, he begged that she would condescend to inspect them. To the show-room Mrs. Oxenden accordingly ascended. It was at that hour in the afternoon when fashionable loungers of both sexes are wont to drop in at such establishments, either to while away the time, or to see if there be anything new which may strike their fancies. The show-room on this occasion was more than ordinarily thronged, and the diamonds were the centre of attraction. Several ladies of rank were present with their husbands or fathers, and many a cajoling word was whisperingly spoken from beauteous lips, in the hope that the diamonds would be won as the reward of the honeyed language. But the sum was too great, and thus the cajoling was useless.

Mrs. Oxenden made her appearance, escorted by the shopman from below. As she entered the room, the glance which she swept around showed her that Colonel Tressilian was present. This was the officer whose mistress she had formerly been, — the same whom she had encountered at Marchmont House in Belgrave Square, and who had threatened to expose her if she did not retire from the entertainment. Then she had felt herself to be in his power; now she no longer dreaded exposure. She had accepted the position of a kept mistress, and she was prepared to arm herself with all the false pride and hauteur of a brazen hardihood.

She affected not to perceive Colonel Tressilian, and he was by no means likely to court a recognition on her part, for a young and beautiful wife whom he had married about a year back was leaning upon his arm. We should observe, however, that it was by no means generally known that Mrs. Oxenden was the Duke of Marchmont's mistress, although, as a matter of course, there were whispers in certain quarters to that effect.

Colonel and Mrs. Tressilian were amongst a group engaged in the inspection of the much-coveted diamonds; there was, however, space sufficient to afford Mrs. Oxenden room to take her place at the table in the middle of which they stood beneath a glass globe.

"Are they not beautiful?" she heard Mrs. Tressilian whisper to her husband.

"They are truly magnificent, my dear," responded the colonel in the same low tone.

Mrs. Oxenden heard Mrs. Tressilian heave a profound sigh, which was full of longing covetousness, as she continued to gaze upon the diamonds.

"You know, my dear," continued the colonel, still speaking in a whisper, which he supposed to be audible only to his wife's ears, "nothing would afford me greater pleasure than to purchase those gems for you. I offered a cheque for seven thousand, as you well know, but it was refused, and I am sure you cannot wish me to go any higher?"

"No, certainly not," rejoined his wife. "But still —" and with another deep sigh she stopped short.

"I see that you are very anxious to have them," proceeded the colonel, "and it is no wonder. I tell you what I will do, my love. I will offer seven thousand five hundred for them, and I dare say the cheque to that amount will not be refused."

"Oh, how kind and good of you!" answered his wife. "I already consider them to be mine. And to confess the truth, I had so completely set my heart upon them —"

"Now that you tell me this, I cannot possibly suffer you to be disappointed," interjected Colonel Tressilian. "Come, let us go and give the jeweller his own price, whatever it may be."

The eyes of the beautiful Mrs. Tressilian lighted up with ecstatic joy as she accompanied her husband from the show-room, neither having the remotest suspicion that any portion of their discourse had been overheard. Mrs. Oxenden beheld the door close behind them, and a fiendish expression of triumph flashed in the depths of her large dark orbs.

"These diamonds are truly magnificent," she said to the shopman who had conducted her to the show-room.

"Everybody has admired them, ma'am," he responded, "and many offers have been made."

"What is the price?" inquired Mrs. Oxenden.

"Eight thousand guineas, ma'am," was the shopman's answer, "with a discount of five per cent. for ready money."

"And these are the lowest terms?" said the lady.

"The very lowest, ma'am," and the shopman began to look eager, for he perceived that there was a chance of her being a purchaser, but he also feared lest she should slip through his hands.

Mrs. Oxenden examined the diamonds more closely, and all the other personages present looked on with interest, for they likewise thought that a purchaser was found at last. The door opened, Colonel and Mrs. Tressilian reappeared, and at that very instant Mrs. Oxenden said to the shopman, "I will give you your price for the diamonds; they are mine."

"Oh, how unfortunate!" was the involuntary ejaculation which burst from Mrs. Tressilian's lips, and the meaning of which may be explained to the effect that the proprietor of the establishment had just stepped out, but was expected to return in a few minutes, when Colonel Tressilian, in order to gratify his wife, would have been prepared to meet his demand.

All eyes were turned from Mrs. Oxenden toward Mrs. Tressilian, who with the twofold vexation of disappointment, and of having betrayed it, could not prevent the tears from forcing their way. Nothing could exceed the annoyance of Colonel Tressilian himself, when Mrs. Oxenden darted a look of haughty triumph upon him and of contemptuous pity upon his wife. The colonel grew pale and bit his lips with concentrated rage; then turning suddenly on his heel, he led his wife forth from the room.

Mrs. Oxenden accompanied the shopman to the counting-house, the proprietor of the establishment having just returned. He was by no means prepared to trust a stranger with such a costly amount of property, nor even to send the diamonds to her house without previous payment. Nor did she choose to expose herself to the humiliation of a refusal on the point. She therefore desired that he would send the bill in an envelope to his Grace the Duke of Marchmont, and she intimated that it would be paid on presentation. The jeweller bowed, and attended the lady forth to her carriage. He now comprehended that she was a duke's mistress, but it was no concern of his, so long as the bill was paid, of which he entertained not the slightest doubt.

And the bill was paid, and the diamonds were sent home to Mrs. Oxenden. But the Duke of Marchmont was as-

tounded at this act of extravagance, — an extravagance which was more wilful and wanton than any whereby he had previously found himself victimized on Mrs. Oxenden's account. Accordingly, on the following day, at about the hour of noon, he proceeded to the residence of his new mistress, with the firm resolution of remonstrating against her conduct. She expected this visit, and she was prepared to give Marchmont such a reception as she deemed most suitable under the circumstances. It was by no means her intention to wheedle or to cajole him, or to take the trouble of condescending to blandishments; she had assumed the attitude of an imperious mistress from the very first, a mistress in two senses of the term, and she did not feel inclined to step down from her pedestal. She was apparelled in a dark dress which set off the symmetry of her shape to the fullest advantage of its superb contours, and she felt all a woman's pride in the consciousness of her grand beauty.

The duke, feeling that circumstances had become exceedingly serious, had summoned all his courage to his aid, and on entering the apartment where Mrs. Oxenden received him, he at once broached the purport of his visit.

"You drew heavily upon me yesterday," he said, "and it was at least very inconsiderate to take such a step without previously consulting me. It might have happened that I had not sufficient in my bankers' hands to meet the cheque which I was at once compelled to draw."

"And doubtless your bankers would have honoured it all the same," said Mrs. Oxenden, with a species of haughty composure.

"But I would not overdraw them for the world," answered the duke. "That is not, however, the precise question. It is whether or not — "

"There is no question at all," interrupted Mrs. Oxenden. "On the night that you and I were so strangely thrown together, you said to me, 'You are poor, I will make you rich; there is nothing you can ask which I will not grant, — money in abundance, riches, gold, and gifts.' These were your promises. Are you fulfilling them when you play the part of a niggard for a few thousand pounds? It is not the first time that you have made a grimace on account of my purchases, and it would seem, therefore, as if we did

not have a thorough understanding together at the outset. If not, let us have it now."

"There is moderation in all things," replied the Duke of Marchmont, "and you ought to be reasonable. Frankly speaking, I have not the means to support such marvellous extravagancies as these."

"And I tell you, my lord," exclaimed Mrs. Oxenden, her dark eyes now flashing angrily, "that you do possess the means, and that you shall furnish me with them. You are immensely rich, and I am positively ashamed of you for daring — yes, I will use the word daring — to come and plead pauperism in my presence."

"Mrs. Oxenden," exclaimed the duke, making a desperate effort to assert his own empire over her imperiousness, "I cannot and will not minister to your boundless extravagancies. If you choose to be reasonable henceforth, we will say nothing more of the past. Two or three thousand a year will keep you in affluence, and this amount I do not grudge — very far from it."

"Enough, my lord," ejaculated the lady, "it is high time for me to speak. Not many weeks have elapsed since a young Hindu woman was nearly murdered — "

"Why refer to this?" demanded the duke. "Did you not promise — "

"That the seal of secrecy should remain upon my lips," continued Mrs. Oxenden, "so long as you remained faithful to your own side of the compact. In one word, my lord, you are in my power, and you know it. Recollect, I overheard everything which took place between yourself and the ruffian who was your hired bravo. It was the Lady Indora whose life was aimed at — "

"For God's sake, be quiet!" moaned the wretched Duke of Marchmont, rising from his seat and pacing the room with the most feverish agitation.

"Nay, since we are upon the subject, and you yourself have compelled me thus to refer thereto, it were better that you should hear me out. The Duke of Marchmont must have very potent reasons for desiring to take the life of the Lady Indora, and perhaps her ladyship herself would be thankful were I to give her such information as would prove that it is none other than the said Duke of Marchmont — "

"She knows it! she knows it!" exclaimed the wretched nobleman.

"Well, she may know it," proceeded Mrs. Oxenden, rising from her seat, and bending her looks menacingly upon the cowering duke, "but the tribunal of justice does not know it. She may have her reasons for sparing you. The law would have none. Oh, you are so completely in my power, dare you play the niggard? Dare you grudge me these paltry thousands which are a reward so well earned for keeping your secret?"

"Enough, I beseech you to say no more!" exclaimed the duke. "We shall understand each other better for the future. Pray forget that I remonstrated at all."

"I am perfectly willing that we should be good friends again," said Mrs. Oxenden, with the patronizing air of an imperious mistress bestowing her forgiveness, "but remember, I must hear no more of these remonstrances when I take it into my head to spend a few pounds."

The Duke of Marchmont, finding himself utterly beaten, and that Mrs. Oxenden was resolved to wield her power most despotically over him, thought that the best course he could adopt was to conciliate instead of irritating. He accordingly made all kinds of promises in accordance with the lady's humour, and he took his departure, inwardly anathematizing himself for having woven a tangled web of crime which day by day and hour by hour was enmeshing him more and more.

The Duke of Marchmont had not long issued from Mrs. Oxenden's house when an old gentleman knocked at the front door. When the summons was answered by a footman in gorgeous livery, this old gentleman said, "Is Mrs. Oxenden at home?"

"She is, sir," was the answer. "What name shall I announce?"

"What name?" echoed the old gentleman, nervously. "No matter. Be good enough to introduce me to Mrs. Oxenden's presence. I — I — knew her at Brighton."

The footman had no orders to refuse admittance to any visitor; he of course comprehended that the mistress whom he served was mistress in another sense to the Duke of Marchmont, and he thought this old gentleman, having known her previously, might possibly have very good

reasons for declining to give his name. The lackey accordingly hesitated no longer to introduce the visitor into the splendidly furnished drawing-room where Mrs. Oxenden was seated.

"Ah, is it you?" she said, quite coolly and collectedly, as if it were a visit of mere ordinary interest. "Pray sit down." Then, as the door closed behind the domestic, her manner all in an instant changed, and it was even with fierceness that she demanded, "What brings you hither?"

"To assure myself with my own eyes," responded the old gentleman, "that the rumour which reached me is true, — that you are living here in gilded infamy — "

Mrs. Oxenden burst out into an ironical laugh.

"Are you come to preach sermons to me?" she exclaimed. "If so, let me assure you at once that I am not prepared to listen to them. Between you and me everything is ended, so far as the ties of husband and wife are concerned. But I did not leave you through any animosity; it was through self-interest. I am enriching myself, and if you like I can put you in a way of enriching yourself. Now do not be a fool, Mr. Oxenden. You must know very well that an old man such as you are — But no matter. I repeat, I have no animosity against you, and therefore I do not wish to say anything to annoy. You can resign me without a sigh, and as you are not overburdened with this world's goods, you will not perhaps lose the opportunity of improving your position. This you may do at the same time that you will be benefiting me."

"What mean you?" inquired Mr. Oxenden, whose first feelings of bitterness were yielding to others of selfish interest.

"I mean," continued his wife, "that as I have left you, never to return, you may as well be separated from me legally as you are in fact. In plain terms, I recommend you to bring an action against the Duke of Marchmont for the seduction of your wife, — claim heavy damages. I will take care that no defence shall be offered to the process, so that it will be neither a tedious nor a costly one, and all the favour I ask in return is that when the suit is finished you will render it the ground of another suit, — I mean a suit for a divorce. Come now, Mr. Oxenden, is this to be an understanding between us?"

"Let it be so," answered Mr. Oxenden, after a few mo-

ments' reflection. "But pray, tell me what object you have in view — "

"No matter," interrupted the lady. "It is sufficient for you to perform the part which I enjoin, and you will find that it is a lucrative one. Go to a solicitor at once."

"I will, I will," exclaimed the old man. "Yes, yes, for more reasons than one."

"What do you mean?" asked his wife, contemptuously. "You surely do not pretend that you are really affected by my having left you?"

"We will not discuss that point," rejoined Mr. Oxenden. "Suffice it to say that I shall be too happy to carry out your suggestions to the very letter. But as I have no money wherewith to commence this suit, and as I cannot suppose that any solicitor will enter upon it without some guarantee against loss on his own side — "

"Enough," interrupted Mrs. Oxenden, "you shall have money." Then as she opened her writing-desk and took forth a number of bank-notes, she laughed, exclaiming, "Is it not singular to use the duke's own money in bringing an action against himself? Yet so it is. Here, Mr. Oxenden, take these notes. And now depart."

The old man did as he was bidden, and on quitting the house, he bent his way direct to an attorney of whom he had some little previous knowledge.

Mrs. Oxenden, having thus dismissed her husband, retired to her toilet-chamber, to dress for her afternoon's ride in her magnificent carriage. She opened the casket containing the splendid diamonds, and contemplated them with satisfaction and triumph. She had not as yet rung for her maid; she was alone in that dressing-room. It was elegantly appointed; every possible refinement that could be introduced into such a place was to be observed there. A velvet curtain, with a massive gold fringe, separated it from the bathroom, which was also most luxuriously fitted up. Beyond the bathroom was a little antechamber, communicating with the bedroom on one side, and having a private staircase on the other, this being for the accommodation of the lady's-maid, who could thus in a few moments attend to the summons of the bell without being forced to take the more circuitous route of the principal staircase of the house. Such at least was the original aim of the architect who

planned the commodious dwelling, though in the case of Mrs. Oxenden we shall speedily find that the flight of stairs just alluded to served another purpose.

She was in the midst of her contemplation of the diamonds when her ear caught the sound of a door gently opening and shutting, and a smile appeared upon her countenance. There was a light step traversing the bath-room; the velvet curtain was partially put aside for a moment, and an elegant young gentleman revealed himself to the eyes of the lady. But not unknown to her was he, nor was he an unwelcome intruder there. On the contrary, she at once received him in her arms, and as she caressed him with all the burning enthusiasm of her impassioned temperament, she said, " Dearest, dearest Alexis! "

" You see that I have availed myself of your permission as well as of the key," responded the visitor, as he returned those caresses.

He was perhaps one of the most beautiful youths on whom the eyes of woman ever rested lovingly. He was not above one and twenty, and possessed features so delicately chiseled that if he had been dressed up in feminine garb he might easily have passed as a lovely specimen of the fair sex. His face was altogether beardless; his hair was of a rich brown, and curled naturally; his eyes were of a violet blue; his lips somewhat full, but perfectly well shaped. His figure, which was exceedingly slender, was of the most elegant symmetry; he had a sweet, musical voice, and he knew how to modulate its tones to the tenderest language of love. Before continuing the thread of our narrative, we may observe that Alexis Oliver was the youngest son of a country gentleman of some property, and having renounced the profession of the bar, for which he was originally intended, he had led an idle and dissipated life as a young man about town. The allowance he received from his family was exceedingly small, and having fallen in with Mrs. Oxenden, he gladly accepted her overtures, and yielded to an amour that, so far from costing himself anything, appeared to promise to become the means of filling his purse. In plain terms, so far from Alexis Oliver having to keep his mistress, it was the mistress who proposed to keep him as her paramour. As in complicated machinery there are wheels within wheels, so in respect

to this woman there were depravities within depravities; and she who was the wife of one man and the paid mistress of another, became the paying mistress of a third who, as we have said, served as her paramour.

"My dear Alexis," she said, "I have an excellent story to tell you," and she at once related how she had purchased the diamonds, thereby revenging herself on Colonel Tressilian, and at the same time giving the Duke of Marchmont another proof of the power which she was despotically resolved to wield over him.

Alexis laughed heartily, not because he really saw anything particularly amusing in the affair, but because he perceived that the lady herself wished to treat it in that agreeable light. The reader now therefore understands that he was one of those despicable creatures who for their own selfish purposes seem to forget the sex to which they belong, and practise toward the depraved women who keep them those cajoleries, wheedlings, and servile coaxings which kept women are usually wont to observe toward those who pension them.

"But are you not afraid," he inquired, "that the duke will consider you are going a little too far? Or have you succeeded in gaining such a power over him — "

"Yes, dearest Alexis," answered Mrs. Oxenden, "I have gained that power over the Duke of Marchmont."

"It is an immense power," said young Oliver, musingly; and the idea stole into his mind that it must have some other source than mere infatuation on the duke's part. "But how," he inquired, "how, my sweetest and dearest friend — "

"You must not question me, Alexis, on that point," interrupted Mrs. Oxenden. "I have promised to make you my confidant in most things. Indeed, I love you so much that I feel disposed to give you all my confidence, but there is that one point — "

"Do not think me too curious," said the youth, though his curiosity was in reality piqued and he was resolved sooner or later to gratify it. "You are so handsome it is no wonder you have obtained this power over the Duke of Marchmont. And does he not harbour the slightest suspicion — "

"That I receive visits from you?" exclaimed Mrs. Oxen-

den. "Oh, no, no! And now I will tell you of a splendid plan which I have set on foot, — a plan, my dear Alexis, that, when realized, will enable me to do great things for you. What should you think if you were to behold me a duchess?"

"A duchess?" exclaimed the young gentleman, starting with mingled astonishment and delight. "Is it possible you entertain such a hope? But have you forgotten that the Duke of Marchmont is already married?"

"I have not forgotten it," answered Mrs. Oxenden; "on the contrary, it is the principal obstacle, but still it is not invincible. No obstacle is too great for one who has the energy to grapple with it, and that energy is mine, Alexis, — you know that it is mine."

"But you yourself are married!" cried the young gentleman, with increasing bewilderment.

"Listen, Alexis, and I will give you a proof of my confidence. My husband is about to commence a process against the Duke of Marchmont; he will of course succeed, and then he will sue for a divorce from myself. In this also he will succeed, and on the day of his success I become freed from matrimonial trammels. So far so good, is it not?"

"Up to that point indeed," replied Alexis, "the project is admirable. But in respect to the duke — "

"Listen to me again," proceeded Mrs. Oxenden. "The Duchess of Marchmont is a well-principled lady, and think you not that she would be shocked if she learned that her husband was maintaining a mistress in a most sumptuous manner? Think you not that she would remonstrate with him, and that when she found that remonstrances failed, she would become indignant, she would feel her own position to be insupportable, she would sue for a divorce? And are there not means of goading her up to that point? Are there not such things as anonymous letters, for instance? And cannot you, my Alexis, become my assistant to a certain extent in working out these aims? It is for you to pen the letters which shall make the Duchess of Marchmont aware of her husband's proceedings. Let the very first convey to her the intelligence that he has expended thousands of pounds in purchasing diamonds for his mistress. Let epistle follow upon epistle, and let each one be written in terms which shall wound the pride of the duchess to an intolerable extent. I

repeat, we will goad her to desperation, so that if she have only the ordinary feelings of a woman she will seek to separate herself from the man who treats her thus. Yes, Alexis, there must be a double divorce, and then, oh, then," added Mrs. Oxenden, with a triumphant expression of countenance, " trust to me to compel — yes, I use the word compel — the Duke of Marchmont to conduct me to the altar."

" These are grand schemes," said Alexis, " and you know that I will enter into them. Only tell me how I am to act."

" We will so arrange the details of our proceedings," said Mrs. Oxenden, " that they shall be certain to result in success. I am prepared for all their intricacies; I do not blind myself to the magnitude of the obstacles which I have to encounter. But I possess the requisite energy. Indeed, Alexis, it is a stake worth playing for. And you whom I love so well, you who have inspired me with a passion such as never before burned in this heart of mine — "

" Oh, my adored friend," exclaimed the youth, clasping the infamous woman in his arms, " how rejoiced should I be to hail you as Duchess of Marchmont."

We need not carry our report of this conversation any further, but before concluding the chapter, we will make a few observations. As already stated, Alexis Oliver was only playing a subtle and treacherous part. He in reality experienced not the slightest attachment toward Mrs. Oxenden; it suited his purpose to become her pensioned paramour, and therefore to flatter her in every sense and to fall into her views. On the other hand, Mrs. Oxenden was completely infatuated with him, and the wonted strength of her character was positively absorbed in the weakness of this passion. Blinded thereby, she was ready to give him her completest confidence; she fancied that he was sincere in all he said, that he loved her with the ardour that he professed, and that it was herself, and not her purse, that was the object of his devotion.

CHAPTER III

THE LAWYER'S OFFICE

The scene shifts to a lawyer's office in Bedford Row, Holborn. The name of Mr. Coleman was upon the door-post, and that he was in a very flourishing way of business might be judged from the fact that he kept numerous clerks, that the carriages of wealthy clients were often seen stopping at his door, that the tin cases of his own private room contained deeds of immense value and importance, of which he was the custodian, and that his account at his banker's was always one which rendered him a valuable customer. Mr. Coleman had not as yet reached the prime of life; he was intelligent and active, and he bore an unblemished character.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon that Mr. Redcliffe entered the clerks' office, and inquired if Mr. Coleman were disengaged. By the respectful manner in which the query was answered, and by the alacrity with which one of the clerks hastened to conduct Mr. Redcliffe up-stairs to the lawyer's room, it might be judged that the visitor was a client of no insignificant importance. Mr. Coleman received him with the utmost respect, and when the clerk had retired, the man of business said, "I expected you, Mr. Redcliffe. It is for to-day. And let me hope that the result will be as you have expected, and that the time is not far distant when I shall be enabled to address you by another name."

"Heaven grant that it may be so!" replied Mr. Redcliffe; and then, as an expression of the deepest anxiety, and even of intense anguish, passed over his countenance, he added, "Oh, this species of unnatural warfare which I am waging — it rends my heart!"

"And yet, my lord — Mr. Redcliffe, I mean," said the lawyer, thus suddenly correcting himself, "if the warfare itself be unnatural, it has been by the most unnatural circumstances forced upon you."

"Yes, God knows it was not of my seeking," rejoined Mr. Redcliffe, "or at least the original causes thereof — But no matter. Let us trust to the issue. Are you confident that Armytage will come?"

"Yes, he is certain," replied Mr. Coleman. "He will come to sue for time, — perhaps he will even ask for further advances."

"Think you," inquired Mr. Redcliffe, his countenance assuming an expression that was half-gloomy, half-sad, — "think you that the web has so completely closed in around him?"

"I am convinced of it," replied the lawyer. "I have watched his progress day and night, I might almost say; I have fathomed all his proceedings, I have penetrated all the desperate ventures in which he has embarked, and I know that his failure has been signal and complete."

At this moment the door opened, and a clerk entered, saying, "If you please, sir, Mr. Oxenden wishes to see you."

"Mr. Oxenden?" repeated the lawyer. "Methinks I know the name, and yet I cannot recollect — "

"It is that old gentleman, sir, who lives at Brighton," said the clerk, "and against whom you were once employed by some creditor, when, if you please to recollect, sir, Mrs. Oxenden called, — a fine, tall, handsome lady, — and she brought a cheque, which she had received from Sir John Steward, to settle the business."

"Ah, I remember," ejaculated Mr. Coleman. "But I cannot see Mr. Oxenden now, I am engaged."

"Wait one instant!" cried Mr. Redcliffe, whose interest and curiosity had been awakened by the discourse. "You had better see this Mr. Oxenden; I have reasons which I will explain."

"Then ask him to walk up," said the lawyer, turning to his clerk; "and should Mr. Armytage call, bid him wait, — be sure to bid him wait."

The clerk withdrew, and Mr. Redcliffe said, "With your permission I will retire into the next room, — that room

where, according to our arrangement, I am to be concealed when Armytage visits you."

"By all means," said the lawyer; and rising from his seat, he followed Mr. Redcliffe into the adjacent room. "But about this Mr. Oxenden —"

"His wife," interrupted Redcliffe, "is now the mistress of him whose name I can never breathe unless to associate it with some fresh deed of crime or profligacy. My God, alas that it should be so! I know much of these Oxendens, — I mean by repute, or rather, I should say, by information which I have received from the lips of Christian, who was at the house of that very Sir John Steward at Ramsgate —"

Here Mr. Redcliffe's observations were cut short by the opening of the door of the adjacent room. Mr. Coleman accordingly left him in his place of concealment, and hastened to receive Mr. Oxenden.

"There are particular circumstances, sir," began Mr. Oxenden, as he took the seat which was offered him, "that render it necessary for me to engage the assistance of some eminent and respectable solicitor. I have no lawyer of my own, and you indeed are the only professional gentleman in London with whom I have any acquaintance. Will you act for me?"

"If you will explain, Mr. Oxenden, the circumstances to which you allude," said Mr. Coleman, "I shall be enabled to give you an answer."

"My wife has been taken from me," resumed the old gentleman; "she has been seduced from my arms by one who is very highly placed. I mean the Duke of Marchmont. I must punish the seducer, and I must procure an eternal separation from the woman who has dishonoured me. This is the reason that I require professional assistance, and whatsoever amount you may demand in advance I am ready to pay it."

"You mean, Mr. Oxenden," said the lawyer, inquiringly, "that you purpose to bring an action for damages against the Duke of Marchmont, and that if you be successful therein, you will carry the case up to the House of Lords and procure a divorce?"

"That is my meaning, those are my objects," was the reply. "I will never rest until I have punished that villainous seducer of my wife."

"And the evidence which you have to bring forward?" asked Mr. Coleman.

"What evidence can be better than that the depraved woman is living under the protection of the Duke of Marchmont? He has taken a house for her, he has supplied her with equipages, with horses and servants, he visits her frequently —"

"If all this can be proved, it is sufficient," interrupted Mr. Coleman. "I will make notes of the information you now give me, I will institute inquiries, and if you will favour me with another call in a day or two, I shall be better enabled to give you my opinion upon the case."

Mr. Oxenden accordingly took his departure, and immediately afterward Mr. Armytage was announced. Though Zoe's father was not above fifty-two years of age, yet he looked older, for care and anxiety had traced upon his countenance the marks of their ravages. His hair was completely gray, there were deep lines upon his forehead, and that expression of cold, worldly-minded calculation which his features had been wont to wear had become subdued, or we should perhaps say had changed into one of settled wretchedness. He entered the office with the mingled nervousness and humility of a man who was very far from being in a condition to pay a large sum of money, but rather with the demeanour of one who, as Mr. Coleman had expected, came to sue for grace, leniency, and forbearance. The lawyer did not, however, suffer his countenance to betray that he thus anticipated what Armytage's financial position might really be, but with all civility he motioned him to a seat, and then resuming his own place at the desk, began untying the red tape which held together a number of deeds.

"Well, Mr. Armytage," said Coleman, "I presume from your punctuality that you are here to settle the business according to agreement. And it is very fortunate, inasmuch as my client —"

"Your client wants the money?" said Armytage, with feverish excitement. "Then it is a client who has advanced it? It is not yourself?"

"I indeed!" ejaculated Mr. Coleman. "I can assure you that the legal profession nowadays is not quite so flourishing as to enable one who practises it to advance fifty thousand pounds."

" Good heavens! what am I to do? " moaned the wretched Armytage, clasping his hands in despair.

" Am I to understand," inquired Mr. Coleman, " that you have come unprepared with a cheque for this amount, — an amount which you so solemnly undertook to pay, and for which you gave me this warrant of attorney, exercising full power over your person as well as your property? "

" Good God! you would not take my person? you would not plunge me into a gaol? " cried Armytage, looking as if frenzy had suddenly seized upon him.

" I have already informed you," responded Mr. Coleman, " that it is not my money which you have had; it is that of a client. I am not therefore acting for myself, but for another; and I must obey the instructions which that other has given me."

" But you can make a further advance, or he can make another advance? " said Armytage, gasping as it were with the awfulest feelings of suspense. " If you do not, it is ruin, utter and complete ruin for me, — ay, and not only ruin for myself, but likewise for others. And I who have such opportunities! There is at this moment a project which, if entered into, would be certain to realize hundreds and thousands. Oh, you must, you must afford me this opportunity of getting back my lost fortune, of redeeming my past adversities. Oh, dear kind sir, I beseech, I beseech you to aid me! "

There was a wild horror in the look and manner of Armytage, a species of frenzied terror lest a negative response should issue from the attorney's lips. His countenance was ghastly pale; he leaned forward as he sat, his gaze fixed with a sort of devouring avidity upon Coleman's countenance. The solicitor, who was a humane man, felt his heart touched by the spectacle, and Redcliffe, who was in the next room, was likewise moved as he listened to the tone of anguished entreaty in which the wretched being spoke. But still neither would yield upon the subject; the course which was being adopted arose from a paramount necessity.

" I tell you, sir," continued Armytage, " that it is not merely ruin for one, it is ruin for more. My daughter, my beloved daughter, the amiable and accomplished Zoe, for whom I have toiled so hard, for whose sake I strove to heap up riches, she too will be ruined, she will be reduced to

penury itself, — she who has never known what it is to want. And then her husband, my son-in-law, Lord Octavian — oh, what a dreadful blow for him! No, no, it is impossible, you could not do me so much injury! You would not, you are a man of feeling."

"Mr. Armytage," inquired Coleman, "how much money do you possess?"

"Not a hundred pounds in the whole world!" almost shrieked forth the wretched man. "I ought to have made hundreds of thousands. I ought to be rich. Oh, I ought to have amassed treasures. But a hideous fatality has hung over me, everything has gone wrong. I throw myself upon your mercy."

"Mr. Armytage," said Coleman, rising from his seat, and leaning against the mantel with a certain resoluteness of air, "you borrowed this money for a stated time. The instructions of my client are positive, and however much I may deplore the necessity of using harshness, yet circumstances leave me no alternative."

"And what — what would you do?" asked the miserable man, bending forward in his chair, and looking up with an expression of haggard, ghastly appeal into the lawyer's countenance.

"Mr. Armytage," responded Coleman, "I have already told you that my client's instructions are of the most positive character. And when I tell you that it is no secret to us that you are otherwise indebted, that you have raised twenty thousand pounds by means of bills — "

"Yes — bills!" gasped Armytage, and more hideously haggard, if possible, became his countenance. "Those bills — those bills! Ruin — disgrace — infamy!" he muttered to himself, with a certain vacancy, as if reason were abandoning him.

"And these bills," continued Mr. Coleman, "have all fallen into my hands, or rather, the hands of that same client to whom you were already so largely indebted."

"But they are not as yet due," cried Armytage.

"No, but they will be due in a few days," rejoined Coleman, "and how will you pay them? Upwards of seventy thousand pounds do you now owe to this client of mine, and you have admitted your almost total want of resources. Permit me to ask one question. I believe you possess the

friendship of the Duke of Marchmont. Think you that he will come forward with so large a sum to extricate you from your difficulties? "

" What if he were to advance a part? " ejaculated Armytage, eagerly. " Say twenty thousand? I dare not beseech him for more."

" So far as my client is concerned," responded Coleman, " he insists upon being paid everything to the uttermost farthing. Or else — "

" Or else what? " said Armytage, quickly. " Oh, have mercy! Think of my poor daughter. She has been ill, she has been in France for her health — and, oh, if she were to see her father in prison, it would kill her. I beseech you to have mercy."

" Mr. Armytage," resumed the lawyer, " there is the warrant of attorney, and if you fulfil not your engagement, it must be immediately acted upon. Unfortunately in these circumstances all private feelings are lost sight of. My duty toward my client prevents me from paying that regard to this appeal which you make on your daughter's behalf."

" But who is this client of yours? " exclaimed Armytage, driven almost to despair. " Surely he cannot be so hard a man? Surely he cannot wish to plunge three of his fellow creatures into a ruin for which there will be no redemption? Give me time, even if you will not assist me with a further loan. But to put the bailiffs into my house, to seize upon my person — oh, the disgrace! And then, when the news reaches my poor Zoe — "

" You would make very great sacrifices, Mr. Armytage," said the lawyer, " in order to avoid this catastrophe? "

" Sacrifice! " ejaculated Armytage. " Tell me what sacrifice you demand. Tell me what I can do."

" There is something, Mr. Armytage," said Coleman, " yes, there is something, but you little suspect to what I allude — yet there is something, I repeat — "

" My God, keep me not in suspense! " cried the miserable creature, imploringly, " but tell me, is there a means of saving myself? "

" There is a means," answered the lawyer; " it is the only alternative to save you from a debtor's prison. I will even go farther, and, wild though my words may seem, yet they are nevertheless fraught with truth. The warrant of attor-

ney, and the bills which are coming due, may all be torn up before your face and tossed into the fire; the lost fortune of your daughter may be replaced, and ruin may be averted from yourself — if — if," repeated Coleman, with a solemnly significant look, — " if you — "

" Oh, for Heaven's sake speak! " cried Armytage, now almost wild with mingled joy and suspense. " To avert the blow from Zoe — "

He stopped suddenly short, and, overpowered by his feelings, burst into tears.

" Yes," continued Mr. Coleman, after a brief pause, during which those tears flowed freely from the eyes of Armytage, " you can save yourself. But I tell you that the sacrifice you may have to make is immense, inasmuch as it involves the complete unbosoming of every secret which your heart has harboured."

" What mean you? " gasped he to whom these words were addressed.

" I am speaking intelligently," proceeded the lawyer. " Look down into the depths of your soul, and see if there be nothing there which you have hitherto locked up in the profoundest cavern where the most stupendous secrets could possibly be retained. Choose whether you will have that mighty secret dragged into the light of day, or whether you will dare a debtor's prison? "

" I do not understand you," said Armytage, and yet it was with a look and in a tone which conveyed the impression that he was, as it were, appalled by the manner in which he had just been addressed.

" I will now deal more frankly with you," proceeded Mr. Coleman. " The whole tenor of my connection with you from the very first instant that I sought you out has had one object in view, and only one object. I knew that you were in difficulties, and therefore it was not in a blind confidence that I advanced you my client's money. No, it was to get you into our power; and for this reason did I likewise find out where you had bills circulating, for this reason was money given for those bills, that they might get into our hands and paralyze you all the more completely when the day of reckoning should come. The web has enmeshed you, it has closed in around you, and there is but one means for your emancipation. Everything depends now upon your-

self. I offer to annihilate your debts by the destruction of bonds and documents; I offer likewise on my client's part to restore your daughter's fortune with which you have made away; and more than that, I will guarantee to yourself a certain sum of money, a reasonable sum, to the amount of a few thousand pounds, so that if you consider you have positively and veritably a chance of redeeming your broken fortunes, the opportunity will be afforded you. On the other hand, the fullest and completest revelation in respect to certain past incidents whereof I have no doubt that you possess a knowledge, — this is the condition on which alone so much will be done for you. Need I speak more plainly? Your countenance," added Coleman, impressively, " proves beyond a matter of doubt that you labour not under the slightest uncertainty as to the meaning of my words."

" But is this a delusion? Am I under the influence of a waking dream? Dare I believe the language which meets my ears? " and Armytage, pressing his hands to his throbbing brows, appeared to feel as if this would steady his reeling brain.

" You may believe everything you hear," responded Mr. Coleman. " Have I not already told you that all has been a matter of calculation? You remember that I sought you out, I forced money upon you; it was not you who first addressed yourself to me."

" True! true! " ejaculated Armytage. Then suddenly starting up, he fixed his eyes keenly upon the lawyer, saying, " But if I were to tell you everything, would any harm redound upon my own head? "

" I can scarcely think, Mr. Armytage," replied Mr. Coleman, " that you yourself have a crime wherewith you have to reproach your conscience — unless it be the concealment of your knowledge of another's crime; but that is comparatively venial."

Armytage reflected; a powerful struggle was evidently taking place within his breast, and turning again toward the lawyer, he said, " It is true I could make a revelation, but to what use would it be turned? "

" You must not question me too far," answered Coleman. Then assuming a solemn air, he added, in a corresponding tone, " The day is near at hand, Mr. Armytage, when the justice of Heaven will assert itself, and when all mysteries

shall be cleared up. Think you that if I were not in possession of a certain clue I should be speaking as I am now addressing you? Think you that so much trouble would have been taken and so much money ventured if there were not in the first instance a degree of certainty as to the result which was to be produced? Look at your position. The abyss of ruin yawns to receive you, whereas, on the other hand, you may be restored to the enjoyment of affluence, and all your adversity may be turned into prosperity."

"My debts will be forgiven me?" said Armytage; "my daughter's money which I have lost will be restored to me?"

"All — everything," replied Mr. Coleman. "And now —"

At this moment the door was thrown open, and a clerk announced, "The Duke of Marchmont."

The lawyer started, and an expression of mingled wonderment and annoyance passed over his countenance. He was astonished that this nobleman should have so suddenly made his appearance at such a crisis, and he was vexed because he fancied that his interview with Armytage might now take a turn different from that which he had anticipated. Armytage himself likewise started; he became exceedingly agitated; he looked first at Mr. Coleman and then at the duke, as if hardly knowing whether to think that the appearance of his Grace was an unexpected or prearranged event. But his uncertainty on this point was speedily dispelled on observing the look of surprise with which the Duke of Marchmont regarded him.

"What, Armytage, you here?" exclaimed the duke. "Ah! by the bye, now I recollect, you have pecuniary affairs with Mr. Coleman? I hope they are progressing satisfactorily? Mr. Coleman, perhaps I ought to beg your pardon for this intrusion. Your clerk told me that you had some one with you, but the instant I gave him my card he expressed his conviction you would see me without delay."

"Yes, my lord," said the attorney, "I will attend to your Grace at once. Mr. Armytage, have the kindness to step into another room. My clerk will show you thither. We will finish our business presently."

The clerk, who had lingered at the door, led Mr. Armytage across the landing to another room, and the Duke of Marchmont remained alone with the solicitor, — at least so far alone as they could be said to be, considering that Mr. Red-

cliffe was in an adjoining apartment and in a position to overhear everything that took place. Mr. Coleman requested the Duke of Marchmont to be seated, and then said, " May I beg to be informed of the business which has procured me the honour of your Grace's visit? "

There was a certain degree of coldness and reserve in Coleman's manner which could not be otherwise than perceptible to one who, by his rank and position, might naturally have awaited nothing but the profoundest respect from the man of business. But not appearing to notice the somewhat glacial distance of the lawyer's demeanour, the duke said, " I do not think, Mr. Coleman, that I shall take up your time many minutes, for I have only a simple question to put, and doubtless your answer will be as concisely given."

" Proceed, my lord," said the solicitor; and as he seated himself at his desk, he awaited with cold and grave attention whatsoever was to follow.

" It has come to my knowledge," continued the Duke of Marchmont, " that you have made inquiries concerning a certain Madame Angelique three or four times lately, and, to tell you the truth, she is somewhat alarmed. Now, I need not inform you, Mr. Coleman, that some of us mortals are frail enough, and I will frankly admit that I, being one of these fallible ones, frequented the establishment which Madame Angelique used to keep. Happening to call upon her to-day, just to see how she was getting on in the villa to which she has retired, I found her overwhelmed with alarm."

" I can assure your Grace," answered Mr. Coleman, " I have recently made no inquiries relative to Madame Angelique. There was a period when I certainly intended to prosecute her for keeping a house of infamy, but when she abandoned that iniquitous profession and retired to some suburb of the metropolis — "

" I understand, Mr. Coleman," ejaculated the duke, " you were satisfied? the establishment was broken up, and that was all which you required? Then I must have been deceived, or, rather, Madame Angelique herself has been misled upon the point. But she certainly labours under the apprehension that you still have your eye upon her, and, what is more, that you entertain the intention of renewing hostile proceedings. Now, between you and me, Mr. Coleman, if this be really the case, I should be very happy to do any-

thing I can for Madame Angelique, not merely for old acquaintance' sake — "

"My lord," interrupted the attorney, coolly, "pardon me for expressing my surprise at the circumstance of such phrases of sympathy and friendship dropping from your lips in reference to such a woman."

"I know very well," responded the duke, drawing himself up haughtily for a moment, "that it may appear strange to any one who is exceedingly particular. But," he added, instantaneously unbending and assuming an urbane demeanour once more, "I hope you will treat the matter as between men of the world. You can very well understand that if any proceedings were instituted against Madame Angelique, she might possibly give publicity to the names of some of her principal patrons, and as this would seriously affect the reputation of many individuals highly placed, I venture to express a hope that for their sake — "

"One word is sufficient, my lord," interrupted Mr. Coleman, "and I hesitate not to declare that the topic is fraught with infinite disgust for me. I am at present taking no legal proceedings against Madame Angelique, but let me tell your Grace that if I were doing so the chance of involving all the titled names in the kingdom would have no weight with me."

"Setting aside the species of reproof conveyed in your words," said Marchmont, for an instant biting his lip, "and which may be more consistent with morality than courtesy, I thank you for the assurance you have given me. I wish you good afternoon, Mr. Coleman," and the duke was walking toward the door when, as if suddenly struck by a recollection, he ejaculated, "Ah, by the bye, what about Armytage? I know him well; he is a worthy man, but foolishly speculative, and he has always got his brain full of ideas about making a fortune. I hope that his affairs — "

"My lord," interrupted Coleman, with a glacial reserve, "I never speak to one person unnecessarily of the affairs of another."

Again the Duke of Marchmont bit his lip; he hesitated, and lingered as if about to say something more, but thinking better of it, he bowed with a haughty coldness and quitted the room. The opposite door on the landing was half-open, and Armytage, appearing upon the threshold, said, in an

agitated manner, "My lord, one word with you, if you please?"

It was precisely this meeting which Mr. Coleman was anxious to prevent, and he had accordingly followed the duke forth upon the landing. He heard that hastily expressed desire on the part of Armytage, and he stopped short, uncertain how to act.

"Eh, a word with me?" exclaimed the duke, affecting an easy, offhand, indifferent manner, as he perceived that Mr. Coleman was immediately behind him. "Where can we converse?"

"I have no doubt," replied Armytage, "that Mr. Coleman will permit us the use of this room for a few instants."

"Certainly," said the lawyer, for he felt that it would be most churlish — as it indeed would have been, to all outward appearance — for him to refuse so simple a request.

He accordingly bowed, and returned to his own private office, while the Duke of Marchmont entered that room on the threshold of which Mr. Armytage had made his appearance.

"What is the matter, Travers — Armytage, I mean?" demanded the duke, closing the door after him. "You look pale, agitated, ill; something has excited you terribly. But I suppose I can guess what it is? All those grand schemes of yours, of which you spoke to me, and in which so much of the money I lent you has been locked up — "

"My lord, listen," interrupted Armytage, "for it is indeed most serious."

"This is what I feared," said the duke, with an air of such bitter vexation that it almost amounted to anguish. "You are again pressed for money, but I hope, in Heaven's name, you do not expect any more at my hands, for what with an extravagant mistress, and such drains as you have lately made upon my purse, Travers, it would ruin the greatest fortune."

These last words were not exactly uttered with an intention of being overheard by Armytage, but were rather spoken in a musing manner to the duke's own self, while he took rapid and short walks to and fro in the room. Nevertheless, Zoe's father did hear those words, but he seemed to take little heed of them.

"My lord," he resumed, "it is indeed most serious, and I

beseech you to listen to me. Do not interrupt. Every instant of delay is only fraught with additional anguish toward myself, and with additional suspense for your Grace, because what I have to say regards your lordship as much as it does me."

"Travers!" ejaculated Marchmont, darting a peculiarly piercing look upon the speculator.

"Three times has your lordship addressed me by that name within the last five minutes," rejoined Armytage, "and let me tell you that it is ominous. For besides ourselves, it would seem as if there is some one else beneath this roof who knows that I once bore that name."

"And what of that?" asked the duke, quickly, but at the same time with an expression of fear in his looks which was in contradiction with the seeming hardihood of his words. "There are several persons in the world who know that you once bore that name. But there is no harm —"

"Ah, my lord, why do you not listen?" exclaimed Armytage, impatiently. "You yourself see that there is some harm pending, and yet do you thus endeavour to stave off the instant when you must hear the truth. Listen, I say, my lord. You see before you a man who is placed in the most difficult and painful of positions. I am ruined. Fifty thousand pounds do I owe this lawyer, or, more properly speaking, his client. Twenty thousand pounds of bills which I have put in circulation — and, my God, such bills! — will be due in a few days; these are also in this lawyer's hands. Zoe's fortune made away with —"

"Well, well!" ejaculated the duke, now evidently fevered with the intensest and most painful curiosity. "But how does all this —"

"How does it regard your Grace?" exclaimed Armytage, bitterly.

"In a direct manner, I mean?" interjected Marchmont. "Of course through friendship for you —"

"My lord, if you would but listen," exclaimed Armytage, with renewed impatience. "I have shown you how on the one side I stand upon the very verge of ruin; I may now tell you how on the other I have received offers of a most astounding, a most incredible nature — and yet all true, all true. I may be rich once more; I may be released from these fearful liabilities, the fortune of my daughter, which I

have dissipated, may be replaced, and, in addition to all this, a large sum may be at my disposal, all on one condition — yes, one condition, my lord."

"And that condition?" ejaculated Marchmont, smitten with the conviction that all to which he was listening must indeed more or less regard himself.

"Your Grace may believe me or not, as you think fit," resumed Armytage, "but I swear unto you that no syllable suggestive of aught to your prejudice went forth from my lips, no word savouring of betrayal did I utter. No, by Heaven, not a syllable, not a word! And yet the proposition was made, a proposition to the effect that if I would only reveal something — Need I, my lord, say more?"

"In the name of God," gasped the duke, white as a sheet, and staggering as if stricken a blow, "what — what —"

But he could not complete the sentence; he could not complete the query which he endeavoured to frame with his ashy quivering lips.

"For years has your Grace's secret been kept," resumed Armytage, "and for countless reasons would I most sincerely desire to keep it inviolate unto the end. But the temptation to betray it is immense. With me everything is now at stake; circumstances render me intensely selfish, and it is for your Grace to decide whether I am to owe the resuscitation of my fortunes to yourself or to that lawyer in the other room?"

Armytage had spoken with a mingled nervousness and resoluteness, and the Duke of Marchmont, sinking upon a chair, gasped for breath. His eyes stared wildly, his countenance became fearful to look upon in its indescribable ghastliness. The punishment of pandemonium was gnawing at the heart within, rending the soul with ineffable excruciations, and reflecting its direst agonies upon the features themselves.

"Travers," said the duke, in a low, hollow voice, as he rose from his seat and approached Armytage, "you could not do this!"

"My lord," was the response, "I repeat that I have grown intensely selfish; I can now think of no one but of myself and of my daughter. Seventy thousand pounds do I owe to this lawyer, or, rather, to his client; and, oh, my lord, you know not how absolutely necessary it is that the bills

which form a portion of that debt should be taken up before they are due."

"But, my God, Travers," asked the duke, with the most feverish and frightful suspense, "what has this Coleman been saying to you? What does he know, what does he suspect? There must have been some clue — "

"My lord," replied Armytage, "I swear that I know nothing as to the origin of all that has ere now taken place. I myself was astounded. Think you that I would have wilfully dropped a word? "

"No, no, Travers," exclaimed Marchmont.

"Pray cease from calling me by that name. It sounds ominous, my lord — I tell you that it sounds ominous. The raven does not croak forth its own doom — "

"Enough, Armytage," interrupted Marchmont, "our very language is taking a tone which is indescribably horrible. But tell me, tell me, I adjure you, tell me — nay, I command you," continued the duke, almost maddened with the hideous thoughts that were agitating in his brain, so that he scarcely knew what he said, "is not all this some device on your part, some understanding with that lawyer for the purpose of drawing me into the settlement of your debts? Oh, if it be, I will forgive you, I will forgive you, I will come forward to assist you. Only relieve my mind, tell me that nothing really is known, that nothing is suspected, — tell me this, I entreat you, Armytage, give me that assurance, my dear friend, and I will pardon the little device, I will attribute it to the desperation of your circumstances — oh, set my mind at ease, I entreat and implore! "

"My lord," responded Armytage, "I am not deceiving you. It is utter folly on your part to blind yourself to the perils which environ you, and to seek to take refuge in an idea which your own good sense tells you is unfounded."

The duke was, however, catching at any straw which floated past, and like all men in desperate circumstances he was endeavouring to reason against his own convictions. No pen can describe the degree of wretchedness which he experienced, the forlorn, desolate state of abject misery to which his mind was reduced. Ghastly as his countenance was, it was still a tablet as imperfect to reflect all that was blighting, searing, scathing, and scorching his heart within

as language itself is powerless to convey the extent of that deep internal agony.

"For Heaven's sake make haste, my lord! How is it to be?" exclaimed Armytage. "You know the worst, and it is for you to decide. Desperate as my own circumstances are, it is to me but a matter of indifference from which quarter help may come, whether from yourself or from that attorney in the other room. There is, however, one thing which you should bear in mind. It is quite evident that whatsoever Mr. Coleman may suspect, he is very far from having any certitude upon the point; it is clear that he must be utterly without proofs, or else he would not be prepared on behalf of his client to make such tremendous sacrifices in order to elicit revelations from my lips."

"True!" ejaculated the Duke of Marchmont, clutching with a species of feverish joy at this hope. "But that client, who is he?"

"I know not, my lord," rejoined Armytage; "his name has never been mentioned to me, nor to my knowledge have I ever seen him. But no matter. If the lawyer remain in ignorance, the client must be equally ignorant."

"And you, Armytage," said the duke, "will you maintain the seal of secrecy upon your lips if I make this enormous sacrifice on your behalf?"

"For how many years, my lord, have I already kept that secret?" asked the speculator, "and think you it is a secret which I should willingly reveal? Think you, in a word, it would please me to proclaim to the world that I have so long rendered myself an accomplice, as it were, — yes, an accomplice by my very silence — "

"Enough, Armytage," ejaculated the Duke of Marchmont. "I will do all that is needful. Whatsoever they propose — "

"The items may soon be summed up," said Armytage. "Seventy thousand pounds to be paid to this lawyer, Zoe's lost fortune of sixty thousand to be replaced, — that makes a hundred and thirty thousand. Then say twenty thousand for myself — "

"A hundred and fifty thousand pounds!" exclaimed the duke; "the sacrifice is immense! Nevertheless, it shall be accomplished. Let us compose ourselves, let us calm our feelings, if possible."

Marchmont sat down, rested his elbows on his knees, and buried his face in his hands. He was exerting all his power to tranquillize his mind sufficiently to meet the lawyer and terminate the business. Armytage had far less difficulty in composing his own countenance, for there was now joy in his heart; he was to be rescued from all his embarrassments, and without the dreaded alternative of having to make any revelation whatsoever.

"Now let us rejoin the lawyer," said the Duke of Marchmont, at length rising from his seat; but as he withdrew his hands from his countenance, Armytage perceived that the traces of a recent convulsing agony remained thereupon.

They issued forth together from the room, and Armytage tapped at the door of Mr. Coleman's private apartment opposite. This gentleman at once opened that door, and the two passed in.

"Mr. Coleman," said the Duke of Marchmont, with an almost preterhuman exertion to maintain his composure, "my friend Mr. Armytage has consulted me in respect to his affairs; he has enumerated all his liabilities, and I feel inclined to assist him. Of course you yourself will rejoice that the matter is to be thus terminated in a way which will restore your client all the money he has advanced."

"Mr. Armytage is of course the best judge of his own affairs, my lord," replied Mr. Coleman, with a true professional coldness and gravity, though inwardly he was supremely annoyed at the turn that circumstances were thus taking.

"I believe, Mr. Coleman," proceeded the Duke of Marchmont, "that your own demand upon Mr. Armytage is some seventy thousand pounds, but if you will give me the precise amount, I will at once write you a cheque, and you can hand over to Mr. Armytage the securities which you hold."

The lawyer was of course utterly unable to offer any objection to this proceeding, and adding up the amounts, together with the interest and expenses, he passed the paper specifying the total to the Duke of Marchmont. His Grace glanced quickly at the sum, and, painfully anxious to have the business terminated, he took a slip of paper to write the cheque. While he was thus engaged a clerk entered and handed a letter to Mr. Coleman. Neither the duke nor Armytage imagined for a moment that this letter had any

reference to the present proceedings, and as the former continued to write, the latter went on revolving the ideas that were in his mind. The cheque was completed, and then Armytage, stooping over Marchmont's shoulder, whispered in his ear, " At the same time your Grace must give me the draft for the eighty thousand that remains to be paid, so that everything may be now settled at once."

" And why not presently, or to-morrow? " asked the duke, likewise speaking in a whisper, but hurriedly and even angrily.

" Because, I repeat, everything must be settled at once," returned Armytage, with a resolute air. " The alternatives are before you; you have chosen your own course — "

" Well, be it so," interrupted the duke; and taking another slip of paper, he began to write the second cheque.

Meanwhile Mr. Coleman had read the letter which the clerk had placed in his hand, and a gleam of satisfaction mingled with the expression of astonishment which appeared upon his countenance. The duke and Armytage were too much absorbed by what was then taking place between them to notice the effect produced on the attorney by the letter he had received, and he himself for a few instants appeared irresolute how to act. That indecision was, however, of only transient duration, and suddenly laying his hand upon the shoulder of Armytage, the lawyer exclaimed, " Stop, the matter cannot be settled thus! "

" What," cried the Duke of Marchmont, springing up in terror to his feet, " what mean you? "

" I mean," responded Mr. Coleman, fixing his eyes upon Armytage, although answering the question put to him by the duke, — " I mean that the bills which I hold in my possession are forgeries, and you, Mr. Armytage, have been guilty of a felon's crime! "

It was a cry of anguish which rang from the lips of Armytage, at the same time that an ejaculation of dismay burst from the Duke of Marchmont, as the frightful conviction flashed to his mind that the ruined speculator was now completely in the power of the attorney and his unknown client.

At the same moment hasty footsteps were heard ascending the stairs; the door was burst open, and three other persons appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER IV

THE TREACHEROUS HINDU WOMAN

When last we spoke of the ayah Sagoonah, it was to describe her lying in her couch at Queen Indora's villa, and making unconscious revelations respecting the past. During the night of the day which followed a gleam of intelligence came back into Sagoonah's mind; it faded away, presently it returned, it subsided again, and then it came back with increasing power. She was altogether recovering her consciousness.

Long before morning dawned on that night of which we are speaking, Sagoonah was in complete possession of her mental faculties, and though she uttered not a word, she was now aware of her position and of the frightful calamity which had befallen her. Collecting her ideas, she settled them upon that memorable evening when, disguised in the apparel of her mistress, and laden also with the treasure plundered from the queen, she had intended to escape from the villa, but only to be stricken down by an assassin's dagger.

By the bedside she perceived an elderly woman, whom she had no difficulty in recognizing as a nurse, and presently the queen herself entered the chamber. Sagoonah closed her eyes, and appeared to be sleeping profoundly. The nurse quitted the room for some purpose; Indora bent over the ayah, and entertaining not the slightest suspicion that the treacherous Hindu was now in possession of her reasoning faculties, her Majesty gave audible expression to the thoughts that were uppermost in her mind.

"Oh, Sagoonah, Sagoonah," she murmured, "how could you have been so wicked, you whom I loved and trusted?"

No change upon the ayah's countenance denoted that she heard or comprehended what was thus being said, and In-

dora, wiping away the tears which had trickled down her cheeks, retired to an ottoman at a little distance from the couch, and seating herself there, she fell into a profound reverie. Shortly afterward Christina Ashton entered the chamber, and having bent over the ayah, whom she believed to be still steeped in unconsciousness, she gazed on her countenance for a few moments. Then, heaving a profound sigh, Christina turned toward the queen, and said, in a half-hushed voice, "Think you, dear lady, that Sagoonah will ever recover?"

"Yes, she will recover," responded Indora; "she is evidently much better. This much I can tell by her countenance. But perhaps, my dear Christina, it were better for her own sake that she should never recover, for if she have any good feeling left, the remainder of her life must be spent amidst the agonies of remorse."

"Oh, yes, dear lady," continued Christina, "so much wickedness is incomprehensible. There was such refinement in it that one is almost justified in fancying that the spirit of a fiend must have inspired her for the time. The snake — O heavens! I shudder when I think of it."

"And well may you shudder, dear Christina," rejoined the queen, "for it was terrible. Even while the reason of that wretched girl had lost its guiding power, yet was conscience at work, and in her dreams did she make those revelations which have conveyed to our knowledge all the wickedness of her conduct. But she will recover, Christina."

"And it is you, lady," answered our heroine, "who will have saved the life of her who sought to take your own."

"Yes, she will recover," continued the queen, in a musing manner, yet speaking audibly, "and she will have leisure for repentance, if her heart be susceptible thereof."

"Have you decided, dear lady," asked Christina, "upon the course which you intend hereafter to adopt with regard to her?"

"You know, Christina," replied Indora, "that it is my hope and expectation to be in a short time enabled to return to my kingdom, and if no fresh circumstances transpire to alter my plan, I shall take Sagoonah with me. But never again can I give her my confidence, much less restore her the love which, all menial though she were, I was wont to bear toward her. The remainder of her life must be passed in

strictest seclusion at Inderabad. If she be truly penitent she will not grow impatient of that compulsory retirement to which it is my purpose to consign her; but if, on the other hand, her soul shall continue to cherish rancorous thoughts, it will be all the more necessary that she should be deprived of the power of doing mischief."

"Oh, let us hope that she will be penitent," said Christina; "let us hope it, chiefly for her own sake."

Here the conversation terminated, but not one single syllable thereof had been lost to Sagoonah. She now comprehended that all her iniquity was known, and that even the most terrific episode of her criminal proceedings — namely, that of the cobra di capello — had ceased to be a mystery. She saw, too, that an eternal imprisonment in her own native land was to be her doom, unless indeed she herself should be enabled to frustrate the designs of the queen. But that this imprisonment was intended to be associated with the most lenient circumstances, Sagoonah comprehended, not merely from the way in which her Majesty spoke, but likewise from her knowledge of that royal lady's disposition. Nevertheless, the thought of such compulsory seclusion was sufficient to fill the soul of the ayah with dread and consternation.

We have seen how conscience had been actively at work when reason's governing power was absent; but now that the intellect had recovered its balance, and that the mental faculties had resumed their empire once again, the evil passions of the ayah enabled her to stifle all those reproaches of the monitor within her bosom. Her crimes were known, and never again could she look her mistress in the face. Besides, to become a prisoner for the rest of her days — this was intolerable! And to know that Indora would enjoy happiness in the love of Clement Redcliffe, this likewise was more than the jealous Sagoonah could possibly make up her mind to contemplate. She loathed the very idea of the kindness which she must have been experiencing at the queen's hands since the evening when the dagger of the assassin struck her down; and thus her soul was in every sense filled with gall and bitterness. Penitence and remorse! — these were incompatible with such a disposition as Sagoonah's.

Her mind was made up how to act. At present she felt herself too weak and feeble to move from her couch, but she

was resolved to take the earliest opportunity not merely to escape from the villa, but likewise to carry out all her original plans of vengeance. In the meanwhile it was necessary to dissemble. She must give no sign of consciousness, or else she would be questioned by the queen; perhaps she would be reproached. At all events, it suited her purpose in every way to simulate a prolonged unconsciousness of everything that was passing around her.

Thus several days elapsed, and during this period Sagoonah so well played her part that no one who entered her chamber entertained the remotest suspicion how vividly the light of reason had flamed up again. It was as if a lamp were burning within a tomb which the unsuspicious passer-by conceived to be inwardly plunged into obscurity. Sagoonah felt her strength rapidly increasing, and she soon saw that the moment was approaching when she must put into execution her project of escape. The medical attendant declared that physically she was past all danger, but he expressed to the queen and Christina his apprehension that her reason was gone for ever, — this being the only hypothesis to account for that seeming absence of consciousness which the wily and treacherous Sagoonah so effectually simulated. And she heard the observations which were thus made by the side of her couch, and never once did a muscle of her face move suspiciously, never once did a rush of blood to her cheeks betray her knowledge of what was thus passing around her. Surgeon, queen, Christina, nurse, — all were deceived, all imagined that Sagoonah remained in utter ignorance of her position. They knew not that within that apparently unconscious form the darkest passions were agitating, the deepest designs were being formed, and the vitality of the intellect had sprung up with an unimpaired power.

Days passed, as we have said, since her return to consciousness, and Sagoonah was now watching an opportunity of escape. It failed not to present itself. One morning, after breakfast, when both the queen and Christina were in the Hindu woman's chamber, the following brief dialogue took place.

"It is my purpose, dear Christina," said the queen, "to pay the promised visit this forenoon to Miss Isabella Vincent. You know that I assured your brother I would take the earliest opportunity to form that young lady's acquaintance;

and, indeed, I begin to feel the want of a little change of air and temporary recreation, no matter how brief."

"It is exceedingly kind of you, dear lady," answered Christina, "to think of one in whom my brother is so much interested, and I am rejoiced that you are about to seek some little recreation. I will remain with Sagoonah during your ladyship's absence. Not for a single moment will I leave the chamber, nor abandon her to the sole care of the nurse."

"It is not so necessary, my dear Christina," replied the queen, "to be as particular now as we were wont to be in the first instance. There can be no doubt that Sagoonah's reason is gone, and it may be for ever. On this point the medical attendant has spoken most positively, and I cannot but concur with his opinion. Perhaps in one sense it is fortunate for her that she should have lost the memory of the misdeeds which she has committed, though in another sense it may be unfortunate, for if this state of mental torpor should continue, she will have no opportunity to repent of her sins. But as I was observing, it is no longer needful, my dear Christina, to watch so continuously over her. Provided you will every now and then visit the chamber during my absence, it is sufficient. Indeed, I was thinking that if during the two or three hours I may be away from the villa you would do me a little service — "

"Anything, dear lady," exclaimed Christina, who was always ready to testify her grateful devotion to her at whose hands she had received so many benefits.

"It is one of the little services," continued the queen, "which Sagoonah herself was wont to perform, — I mean the arrangement of my jewel caskets. They require frequent supervision, and likewise to be touched by a delicate hand, so that it is to none of the domestics that I can entrust the duty."

"It shall be performed to the best of my ability," responded Christina, "and I hope to your ladyship's satisfaction."

This dialogue, as we have said, took place in Sagoonah's chamber, — the queen and her young friend being utterly unsuspicious that every syllable was perfectly comprehended by the ayah. The nurse was absent at the moment, but she speedily made her appearance, and while Indora took her

departure in the carriage to pay the intended visit to Miss Vincent, Christina repaired to her Majesty's boudoir to commence the task of inspecting and arranging the gems and jewels of inestimable price which belonged to her royal benefactress.

Sagoonah now felt that her opportunity was at hand. There she lay, to all appearance in a profound torpor, the elderly nurse entertaining no notion to the contrary. It has been said that there are certain reptiles which simulate death in order the more easily to secure their intended victims, and thus was it that the treacherous Hindu woman, like one of the most designing and deadly serpents of her own native clime, was affecting complete inanimation of the intellect, though all the while endowed with the fullest mental vitality.

The elderly nurse busied herself in putting the chamber in order, and then, hearing the clock proclaim the hour of midday, she knew it was the time to procure the refreshment which she was wont to administer to her patient. It was her custom to leave the room only when the queen or Christina should be present, but on this occasion she happened to deviate from her rule, and thus all the more completely favoured the projects of the ayah. Indora was absent, Christina was engaged, Sagoonah seemed wrapped up in mental torpor; the nurse saw not the slightest harm in descending to the kitchen to procure what she required. The ayah waited a few minutes to see whether anybody would come, but the nurse sent no one to take her place temporarily, and Sagoonah was not long ere she availed herself of the opportunity. She descended from the couch; she opened the door and listened; there was no one on the staircase or the landing. She knew, or at least conceived to the best of her knowledge, that Christina was in the queen's boudoir, and it was toward Christina's chamber that she sped. A dress, a shawl, a bonnet, and other needful articles of the toilet, were quickly taken possession of, and Sagoonah glided back to her own room, having succeeded in escaping all observation. She thrust the articles of apparel into a cupboard, and lay down in the bed again. Scarcely had she thus resumed her place on the couch when the door opened, and the nurse made her appearance.

The woman suspected not what had been done in her absence, and while she was administering food to Sagoonah,

who received it with the vacant docility of an infant, Miss Ashton entered. Believing that all went well, Christina soon retired, and returned to Indora's boudoir, where she resumed her occupation with the jewels. Meanwhile Sagoonah was nerving herself for the final effort to escape, and now came the most difficult and perilous part of her prearranged plan.

The nurse was seated by the side of the couch, with her attention deeply absorbed in a volume of a novel. Her back was partially turned toward Sagoonah, so that she might all the more conveniently catch upon the page the light from the windows. All of a sudden the sheet was thrown over the nurse's head, it was drawn tight across her mouth, and Sagoonah's voice, speaking with unmistakable power and plainness, cried, "Dare to shriek forth and I will strangle you!"

The nurse, overwhelmed with terror, sank down in a swoon, and the ayah, springing from the bed, convinced herself that the woman was indeed plunged into a state of unconsciousness. She suffered her to lie where she had fallen, and the sheet being taken off her, Sagoonah kept her eyes riveted upon the nurse's countenance, so that she might be prepared for the first indication of her awakening. With all possible speed did Sagoonah apparel herself in the garments she had taken from Christina's room, and the nurse gave no sign of life while the ayah was thus performing her toilet.

It was with an exulting heart that Sagoonah found circumstances to be progressing thus favourably, but still there were risks to be incurred. At any moment Christina might enter the chamber, or she might encounter that young lady upon the stairs. Nevertheless, Sagoonah was prepared for everything rather than renounce the plan which had thus far progressed so satisfactorily. The old nurse was just beginning to give signs of returning consciousness when Sagoonah opened the door, listened for an instant, and then hurried forth. It was a garden bonnet, with a blue gauze veil, which she had taken from Christina's room, and she drew that veil over her countenance. Gliding down the stairs, she reached the hall just as a female servant was entering in from the farther extremity. Sagoonah sped to the front door with a degree of haste which somewhat astonished the domestic, who took her to be Miss

Ashton. In a moment, however, the disguised Hindu woman disappeared from the servant's view, and the front door closed behind her.

Sagoonah was now free. She hastened through the garden, she reached the gate, she sped along the lane toward the main road. She looked back, no one was in pursuit; more elated grew her heart, her feelings were indeed now at the highest pitch of exultation.

Sagoonah hastened onward. She dared not enter a vehicle, for she had no money in her pocket, and she had lived long enough in England to have a full knowledge of the indispensable character of that article in its application to nearly all the circumstances of life. But she had not proceeded far before she encountered a police officer, and to him she addressed herself.

Meanwhile her flight was discovered at the villa. The female servant who had seen her pass through the hall, and had taken her for Miss Ashton, naturally conceived from the precipitation of her egress that something serious was occurring, and that the invalid ayah was perhaps much worse, so that Christina had hurried off to fetch the medical attendant. The servant ascended the stairs, to see if she could render the nurse any assistance, but on entering the sick-chamber she was stricken with dismay on finding that Sagoonah was gone and that the nurse lay gasping upon the carpet. The servant rang the bell instantly for assistance, while she began to administer restoratives to the nurse, and the first person who answered the pealing of that bell was Christina herself. Explanations were speedily given, and a rapid search made in Christina's own chamber cleared up the mystery. Some of her apparel had disappeared, — the ayah had evidently fled.

The faithful Mark, the queen's majordomo, sped in pursuit, but it was too late; Sagoonah was nowhere to be found. Christina was at first almost frantic, blaming herself for not having exercised sufficient vigilance during the queen's absence. She likewise began to reproach the nurse for what she naturally conceived to be her treacherous complicity in the flight, because Miss Ashton could not conjecture that Sagoonah herself had procured the apparel which served as the disguise for her departure. The nurse however protested her innocence, and explained what had

occurred so far as the sudden attack upon herself was concerned. The condition in which she was found by the female servant corroborated her tale, and Christina, now convinced that the swoon was no simulated one, regretted the reproaches she had addressed to the poor woman. The nurse admitted having left Sagoonah alone for about ten minutes, and thus the manner in which the apparel might have been procured seemed to be fully explained. That the ayah had been practising some stupendous hypocrisy was also apparent, for that she could have so suddenly regained her senses and adopted such energetic proceedings without deliberation and forethought was not to be supposed. Mark, on his return from his ineffectual pursuit, was despatched by Christina with the intelligence to Queen Indora at Isabella Vincent's mansion, and her Majesty returned in all haste to the villa. Thence she despatched a note to Mr. Redcliffe at his lodgings in Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square.

Let us now return to Sagoonah, whom we left at the moment she was accosting the first police officer whom she encountered after her flight from the villa.

"You are a constable," she said, "and it is your duty, I believe, to assist the law and further the cause of justice?"

The officer replied in the affirmative, but he was not a little astonished at the mode in which he was thus addressed, especially as through the blue gauze he caught a glimpse of a countenance which, though with a dusky complexion, was nevertheless of extraordinary beauty.

"I have some information to give respecting a great offender," proceeded Sagoonah; "but I have learned and read enough of your English customs to be aware that I must address myself to a magistrate. Will you conduct me to one?"

For a moment the suspicion flitted through the officer's brain that it was rather to a lunatic asylum than into the presence of a magistrate that the ayah ought to be conducted, but still there was something sufficiently collected in her speech to stagger him.

"What is this information that you have to give?" he inquired.

"I will only tell it to a functionary competent to act upon it," was Sagoonah's response, "and therefore if you

will not at once take me to a magistrate, I must address myself to some other person."

"Come with me, if you please," said the officer, and he conducted her to the nearest station-house.

There Sagoonah repeated to the inspector what she had said to the police constable, and the inspector, taking her into a private room, questioned her more closely. Without telling him everything, she nevertheless said sufficient to induce him to proceed further in the matter, and ordering a cab to be summoned, he escorted the ayah to the police office in Bow Street. There he introduced her to the magistrate, who gave her an audience in his private room. She now no longer hesitated to tell all she knew, and both the magistrate and inspector were astonished at the information which they thus received. The account was in all respects so lucid, the details were so minute, the occurrence to which they referred was so well known, although dating many years back, and the explanations given by the Hindu woman so accurately filled up a certain gap which had hitherto existed in respect to the sequel of that history, that the magistrate felt himself bound to act upon what he had heard.

Leaving Sagoonah at the police office for a brief space, we must direct the reader's attention to Mrs. Macaulay's house in Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square. That worthy lady was seated in her comfortable little parlour, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, and she was refreshing herself with the remnants of a couple of chickens left from the dinner provided for Mr. Redcliffe and Christian Ashton on the preceding day. Mr. Redcliffe had gone off in one direction, Christian in another; the former to visit Mr. Coleman, as already described, the latter to call upon Sir Edgar and Lady Beverley, who were staying in London. Mrs. Macaulay was altogether happy; she had nothing to trouble her, for she had now no lodgers on the second floor to vex her with their meanness, inasmuch as Mr. Redcliffe had for some weeks past occupied as much of the house as she was accustomed to let out. Indeed this had been the case ever since Christian came to take up his abode with that gentleman. Mrs. Macaulay had therefore not merely a handsome rental coming in weekly, but she and her two domestics fared sumptuously every day on the rem-

nants of the repasts served up to her lodgers. What more could a landlady wish for? She could afford to look with a sort of disdain on the ordinary lodging-house keepers in the same street, and as for Mrs. Sifkin, the worthy Mrs. Macaulay experienced an ample revenge for all the wrongs sustained at the hands of that woman by means of the envy and jealousy with which the latter now notoriously regarded her.

Mrs. Macaulay, as we have said, was feasting off the cold chicken left from Mr. Redcliffe's table, flavoured with a slice of ham that Mr. Redcliffe had for his breakfast, and washed down by two or three glasses of sherry which, being at the bottom of one of Mr. Redcliffe's decanters, could not possibly be either wanted or missed by that gentleman. Presently there came a knock at the door, a good loud, commanding double knock, and when the parlour-maid had answered the summons, Mrs. Macaulay heard a masculine voice inquire, " Is Mr. Redcliffe at home? "

" No, sir, he is not," replied the servant-girl.

" Indeed! " exclaimed the visitor, " I am very sorry for that; I wish to see him most particularly. When do you think he will return? "

" I'm sure, sir, I don't know," was the servant's response, " but his dinner is ordered for half-past five as usual. Perhaps, however, missus knows when he will come in."

Mrs. Macaulay made her appearance in the passage at this stage of the conversation, and she perceived that the visitor was a tall, stout man, with bushy whiskers, and if not of very elegant appearance, still far from vulgar.

" Is it very important, sir? " she inquired, for she was always mightily curious to glean whatsoever she could of Mr. Redcliffe's proceedings or affairs.

" Well, it is important," answered the visitor. " I have just arrived from India, and have got a letter for Mr. Redcliffe. I should like to deliver it into his own hands. You know perhaps, ma'am, that Mr. Redcliffe was a considerable time in India? "

" I have heard so," answered Mrs. Macaulay. " Well, if it is so very important I think I can tell you where to find Mr. Redcliffe, for he had a cab fetched when he left about half-past two o'clock, and though I wasn't purposely listening, — for I should scorn the action, — I nevertheless

heard him tell the driver to take him to his solicitor's Number — Bedford Row, Holburn."

"I am exceedingly obliged," said the visitor, and away he went.

Now this individual was none other than the inspector of police of whom we have so recently spoken, and who had disguised himself in plain clothes in order to procure the information that he needed. He returned at once to Bow Street, and took another constable, as well as Sagoonah herself, with him in a cab. They proceeded to Bedford Row, and the inspector, still wearing his plain clothes, bade the constable recline back so that his uniform might not be seen. The inspector himself alighted, and entered alone into the clerks' office. His inquiry was promptly made, and the answer was as promptly given: Mr. Redcliffe was there, and was engaged at the time in Mr. Coleman's private office up-stairs.

The inspector stepped out into the street, and quickly returned, accompanied by the officer and Sagoonah. The presence of the latter was not needed for the purpose of immediately identifying the one who was to be captured, but she had insisted upon seeing out the matter to the very end. She was so fearful that her victim would escape; and, moreover, all her love being turned to burning hatred, she longed to gloat over his downfall.

The clerks in the ground floor office were astonished and dismayed at beholding a constable in the society of the individual in plain clothes who had made the inquiry relative to Mr. Redcliffe, but he speedily announced himself to be an officer of justice, and he warned those present to beware how they raised any alarm which might defeat the purpose that had brought him thither.

In the room up-stairs Mr. Coleman had just pronounced the bills given by Armytage to be forgeries. The Duke of Marchmont was thrown into consternation, the wretched forger himself was smitten with unspeakable horror, when the door burst open, and the inspector made his appearance, followed by Sagoonah and the constable.

The ayah had thrown up her veil, the Duke of Marchmont at once recognized her, and his guilty conscience smote him with the idea that she had come with the officers of justice to arrest him as the instigator of the assassin

deed which, being intended against her royal mistress, had stricken herself. Armytage, at the sight of a constable's uniform, gave vent to a hollow moan at the thought that he was the object of so ominous a visit. Mr. Coleman was seized with astonishment, and perhaps also with misgivings in respect to the motives of the sinister presence.

The inspector glanced around upon the lawyer, the duke, and Mr. Armytage, and when he laid not his hand upon either, nor ordered the constable in uniform to take any one into custody, Marchmont and Armytage began to breathe more freely, but Mr. Coleman's misgivings increased.

"There is an inner room," said the inspector, advancing toward the door of the apartment in which Mr. Redcliffe was all this while concealed.

"It is private," exclaimed Mr. Coleman, placing his back against it.

"Private or not private," said the inspector, resolutely, "I must do my duty. Come, sir, have the goodness to stand aside, or I shall be compelled to use force."

"Beware how you violate the privacy of my offices!" exclaimed Mr. Coleman; but the agitation and distress which he displayed more than ever convinced the police officials that he whom they sought was in the adjacent room.

The inspector was just upon the point of laying his hand upon the lawyer for the purpose of removing him by force, when the handle of the door was turned from within, and a voice exclaimed, "Resist them not, my friend. I surrender."

It was with a low, gasping moan that Mr. Coleman stood away from the door; it opened, and Mr. Redcliffe came forth. The Duke of Marchmont gave such a start and such an indescribable expression swept over his countenance that frightful indeed must have been the feelings which were tearing like vultures at his heart, while Armytage gave utterance to a cry of amazement. As for Sagoonah, while lightnings shot forth from her eyes, she drew her lithe bayadere form, clad in Christina's garment, up to its full height, and her duskily handsome countenance assumed a look of fiendish satisfaction. But it appeared as if Clement Redcliffe beheld not either of the three whom

we have just named; his countenance wore a marble composure, his form was erect, his step was firm as he issued from the inner room, and there was not the slightest agitation of his lip nor vibration of his dark eyes to denote any feeling of uneasiness within.

"Officer, do your duty," he said, in a firm but glacial voice.

"I arrest you, my lord," replied the inspector, "on a charge of murder. You are Lord Clandon by title, better known as the Honourable Bertram Vivian."

"I am he," responded the prisoner. "Coleman, you will accompany me. Spare your handcuffs, sir," he added, turning in a dignified manner toward the police constable, who had just produced the manacles. "It is not my purpose to offer the slightest resistance."

The constable was overawed by the manner in which he was thus addressed, and, at a glance from the inspector, he replaced the handcuffs in his pocket.

Lord Clandon, as we must now call Mr. Redcliffe, *alias* Bertram Vivian, walked forth from the room without bestowing the slightest notice upon either the Duke of Marchmont, Armytage, or Sagoonah, and descending the stairs, he entered the cab, accompanied by the inspector and the police constable. Mr. Coleman intimated that he would follow immediately. Sagoonah likewise descended the stairs, and the inspector said to her, "You must come on to the police office; we shall require your presence there."

The ayah accordingly took another cab, and repaired to Bow Street.

Mr. Coleman remained behind for a few minutes with the Duke of Marchmont and Mr. Armytage. The lawyer's countenance was exceedingly pale, but no longer agitated; it was firm and resolute. Armytage appeared utterly overwhelmed, crushed, and spirit-broken with everything that had taken place; the Duke of Marchmont was evidently labouring under the almost stupefying sense of a horrible consternation. His countenance was ghastly, and he gazed upon Mr. Coleman as if this gentleman were the arbiter of his doom.

"My lord," said the solicitor, addressing himself with a cold sternness to the duke, "the event which has just occurred renders it unnecessary for your Grace to remain

another moment here. Upon that event I shall offer no observation."

"But — but," said the duke, in almost a dying tone, "you will take this cheque, you will settle this business for Mr. Armytage — "

"No, my lord," interrupted Coleman. "I decline your Grace's intervention altogether. Mr. Armytage will remain with me, to talk over these matters. At his peril will he disobey me."

"But, Mr. Coleman," gasped forth the duke, with a desperate but vain effort to assume an air of composure, "as Mr. Armytage's friend you will at least suffer me to speak to him in private."

"Not another syllable, my lord," exclaimed Coleman, resolutely. "And now I insist that your Grace immediately leave my office."

Armytage, with his elbows resting upon the table, had buried his face in his hands, and he was moaning lamentably, while the words, "Oh, my poor dear Zoe!" escaped twice or thrice from his lips.

The Duke of Marchmont lingered with the air of a man whose desperate circumstances impelled him to make one more effort to save himself from the utter destruction which he saw to be imminent; but when he looked at the sternly resolute countenance of the lawyer, he was compelled to admit the conviction that everything was indeed hopeless in that quarter. He accordingly issued from the room, reeling and staggering as if under the influence of wine.

Mr. Coleman suffered a minute or two to elapse, in order to give the duke time for departure, and he then summoned one of his clerks from below.

"Mr. Price," he said in a hurried whisper to this clerk, "you will follow the Duke of Marchmont, you will watch him day and night, you will dog him whithersoever he goes, and if he attempts to leave the country, you will at once give him into custody."

The clerk started with astonishment, and it was a perfect consternation that seized upon him when Coleman whispered a few more words in his ears. The lawyer placed a sum of money in the clerk's hand for whatsoever expenses might be incurred in the mission now entrusted to him,

and he whisperingly said, " Be cautious, be silent. I know that I can rely upon you."

" You may, sir," and the clerk issued from the room.

Another of the dependents was now summoned from the lower office, and when he made his appearance, Coleman said, " Mr. Ingram, you will remain here with Mr. Armytage till my return. Let no one have access to him, and if he should endeavour to escape, call in a police constable and give him into custody on a charge of forgery."

Armytage had all this while remained with his countenance buried in his hands, but when he heard that mandate given by Mr. Coleman, to the clerk, he threw himself at the lawyer's feet, imploring his mercy.

" Everything depends upon yourself," replied Coleman, " and you can now more than ever understand how your testimony will become so needful."

Having thus spoken, the lawyer issued from his office, descended the stairs, and engaging a cab, which happened to be passing along Bedford Row, he proceeded to Bow Street.

Before concluding this chapter, we have one explanation to give. The reader will recollect that Mr. Coleman had received a letter upon the perusal of which he had taxed Armytage with forgery. This letter was from another solicitor, who had first of all discounted the bills for twenty thousand pounds that have been so frequently mentioned. Those bills, as we have seen, had fallen into Coleman's hands, for with the aid of Mr. Redcliffe's money he had taken them from the original discounter. This discounter had that very day happened to discover that the acceptance of some mercantile firm had been forged by Armytage to those bills, and he had accordingly written to communicate the fact to Mr. Coleman. This was the letter which, as we have seen, was received by Coleman a few minutes previous to the sudden bursting in of Sagoonah and the police officials.

CHAPTER V

THE PRISONER IN THE DOCK

THE magistrate at Bow Street had not quitted the office, although it was now past the usual hour for his retirement from the bench, but he awaited the result of the expedition on which the inspector had set out. It was not very long before this official returned, accompanied by his prisoner. The crowd that usually hangs about a police office had dispersed in the belief that the business of the day was over; the newspaper reporters had likewise taken their departure, and the court itself remained empty until the magistrate and his clerk were fetched from their private room by the intimation that the prisoner who was expected had just arrived at the office. The magistrate accordingly returned to take his seat upon the bench, the clerk placed himself at the table, and Lord Clandon was now escorted into the dock. In addition to the persons already noticed, there were only Sagoonah, the inspector, and the constable, besides two or three other police officers, now present. But Mr. Coleman speedily made his appearance, and soon afterward another individual entered the court.

This last-mentioned person was Mark, Queen Indora's faithful majordomo. It will be recollected that her Majesty had despatched a note to Mortimer Street, acquainting Lord Clandon with Sagoonah's flight, and of this note Mark was the bearer. On reaching Mortimer Street he had learned from Mrs. Macaulay — as the disguised inspector had previously done — that Mr. Redcliffe (as he was then called) had gone to his solicitor's in Bedford Row, Holborn. Thither Mark proceeded, little suspecting the fearful nature of the intelligence that awaited him. His astonishment and consternation may therefore be imagined when he

learned from one of the clerks that Mr. Redcliffe had been arrested on a charge of murder, and that he was none other than the Duke of Marchmont's brother, Lord Clandon. Of this fact Mark was hitherto completely ignorant, and it filled him with as much surprise as the incident of the arrest excited his grief. He sped away to Bow Street, and as we have seen, arrived there shortly after the proceedings had commenced.

To prevent any confusion, while the reader refers to some of the earlier chapters of our narrative, it may be as well to remark that during the lifetime of the Duke of Marchmont, Hugh (the present duke) bore the title of Lord Clandon, while his brother was simply the Honourable Bertram Vivian. But when the murder of the old duke gave the higher title to Hugh, Bertram as a necessary consequence became Lord Clandon, and it is thus that we shall speak of him.

On being introduced into the dock, Lord Clandon lost not for an instant that self-possession, calmly though coldly dignified, which at the moment of his arrest he had worn at Mr. Coleman's office. He bowed to the magistrate; when his solicitor entered he bestowed on him a look of friendly recognition, and when he saw Mark make his appearance in the court, he beckoned him to the side of the dock, and bending over, whispered, " You will break this intelligence as delicately as possible to your mistress. But wait until you hear everything that takes place."

Sagoonah had been conducted by the police inspector to a seat just behind the witness-box, and she now looked straight forward, not once turning her eyes after the first glance toward the victim whom her vindictive jealousy had consigned to that ignominious position. She beheld Mark make his appearance, but she affected not to perceive him. Her features were rigid, and dusky though her complexion was, yet a visible paleness, cold and deathlike, sat upon her countenance.

The inspector entered the witness-box, and was sworn. He then addressed the magistrate as follows:

" Your worship is aware that about nineteen years ago the Duke of Marchmont of that day was found murdered at a short distance from Oaklands, his country-seat in Hampshire. A coroner's inquest pronounced a verdict of ' Wilful

murder' against Bertram Vivian, otherwise Lord Clandon. Warrants were issued for the apprehension of the accused, a reward was offered by the secretary of state for his apprehension, advertisements were inserted in the newspapers, but all without effect. The accused had taken his departure, and during this interval of nineteen years nothing ever reached the ear of justice concerning him until this day. From information which I received, I have now arrested the prisoner in the dock, and I charge him with being that same Bertram Vivian, otherwise Lord Clandon, against whom a verdict of 'Wilful murder' was returned by a coroner's inquest in the year 1829."

The clerk of the court then addressed the magistrate:

"By your worship's instructions, in consequence of the information given this afternoon, I repaired to the Home Office, to which the depositions taken at the coroner's inquest in the year 1829 had been forwarded. I have obtained those depositions, and I have them here."

"As the case occurred so long ago," said the magistrate, "it will be necessary to read them."

"Perhaps it would save your worship's time," said the prisoner, "if I were to admit that which it is by no means my purpose to deny, and which I have already admitted at Mr. Coleman's office, namely, that I am indeed that same —"

But here Mr. Coleman rose, and making a sign to the prisoner to be silent, he said to the magistrate, "I should much prefer that your worship would adopt the course you were about to take, as I have my reasons why the whole incidents of the bygone tragedy should be again brought fully to the knowledge of the public. A generation has well-nigh passed since the date referred to, and as my client will plead 'Not guilty' to the dread crime imputed to him, I am anxious that, with the true British spirit of fair play, public opinion may be suspended until a jury of the noble prisoner's countrymen shall have pronounced their verdict."

The clerk of the court accordingly read the depositions. They commenced by setting forth how Purvis the butler and Leachley the valet had found the body of the late duke by the side of the pond, with the dagger sticking in its back. Then followed the evidence of the present Duke of Marchmont, as it was given at the time, and which chiefly went to prove that the dagger was the property of his brother Ber-

tram, and that on the evening preceding the night of the murder he had left his brother at an inn in the neighbouring village, in a terrible state of excitement in consequence of certain matters connected with the Duchess Eliza. It then appeared from the depositions that the landlord of the village inn was next examined as a witness. He deposed to the fact of Bertram having passed about three hours at the tavern in the afternoon and evening of the day preceding the night of the murder, that he was violently excited the whole time, and that he had rushed away in the frenzied state of which his brother had spoken. It next appeared from the depositions that two of the housemaids belonging to Oaklands were examined in succession, and their statement was to the effect that while arranging the chamber occupied by Bertram during his stay at the mansion, they had seen the dagger lying amongst a few other curiosities, which, as they understood, Bertram had brought with him from the United States. The man servant who had specially attended upon Bertram during his visit appeared to have been the next witness, and he was represented as having deposed to the fact that Bertram had shown him the dagger, explaining at the same time that it had been long in the possession of some celebrated Indian chief who died a few months previous to Bertram's departure from Washington. The dagger was described in the depositions and by the witnesses as being of very peculiar workmanship, and once seen, could not possibly have been mistaken.

The depositions proceeded to show that witnesses were next examined to relate the particulars in respect to the dog. It had been found that Pluto was mortally wounded by a pistol bullet, but the weapon itself had not been found, either in the pond or in the neighbourhood, so that it was tolerably evident the assassin had taken it away with him. The cloth which the dog had brought in his mouth was a fragment evidently torn from the skirt of a surtout coat, and it was therefore supposed that the faithful animal had flown at the murderer of his master, in doing which he had received the fatal bullet. It was further shown at the coroner's inquest that Bertram had on a black surtout coat when he left Oaklands after the scene with the duke and Eliza. The depositions went on to state that the evidence being complete, the coroner proceeded to sum up. In alluding to the circum-

stance of the dagger, he said " that it had been incontestably proved that the weapon belonged to Bertram, and that the jury, with this fact before them, would have to weigh well whether, under all the circumstances, it was Bertram's hand which committed the deed, or whether some other person had obtained possession of that dagger with the foulest of purposes." The coroner had remarked " that it was certainly extraordinary that Bertram should have had the dagger about him at the time when he was walking with the duchess and when the incident occurred that compelled him to fly from Oaklands. None of the witnesses had been able to throw any light upon that point, — such, for instance, as proving that the dagger was still in Bertram's room at the time of his flight, or, on the other hand, that they missed it from the room. Certain it was the dagger had dealt the murderous blow, and it was for the jury to say whether the hand of Bertram or that of an unknown assassin had wielded the weapon." Having commented upon all other parts of the evidence, the coroner had left the matter in the hands of the jury.

The depositions concluded by stating that a verdict of " Wilful murder " was returned against Bertram Vivian, *alias* Lord Clandon.

When the clerk of the court had finished reading these depositions, the inspector said, " I now propose, your worship, to introduce a witness who will prove that the prisoner in the dock, so long known by the name of Clement Redcliffe, is in reality the Bertram Vivian, *alias* Lord Clandon, against whom that verdict was returned; and I conceive that your worship will hold this evidence sufficient to remand the prisoner, if not finally to commit him for trial."

Lord Clandon, understanding that Sagoonah was the witness alluded to, was again about to address the magistrate, to admit his identity, so that the ayah's evidence might be dispensed with; for with a generous delicacy he was anxious to prevent Queen Indora's name from being brought forward in the present proceedings. But Mr. Coleman, advancing toward the dock, whispered to the prisoner in the following manner:

" Your lordship must really suffer the proceedings to take their course. As there will inevitably be a trial, — and I hope to God it will only be for form's sake! — but still as a

trial must ensue, it is requisite we should glean every particular. Queen Indora's name must sooner or later be mentioned in the proceedings, and therefore as well to-day, at this court, as in another place a short time hence. I beseech that your lordship will leave yourself entirely in my hands."

"My friend, I will do so," answered Lord Clandon, and the solicitor retired to his seat.

The inspector now directed Sagoonah to enter the witness-box, and she was first of all questioned by the magistrate in respect to her knowledge of the obligations of an oath. Her answers were satisfactory, and she was sworn according to her own creed. Then, partly in reply to leading questions put by the inspector and the magistrate, and partly of her own accord, she proceeded with her evidence. She spoke the English tongue sufficiently well to render it entirely intelligible, and it was rather with a peculiarity of accent than in broken phrases that she delivered her testimony. Her veil being raised, the extraordinary beauty of her countenance could not fail to strike those present to whom she was a stranger; her demeanour was coldly calm and collected, and her voice trembled not. But once, and once only, did she glance toward the prisoner in the dock, and this occasion will be mentioned in its place.

She deposed that her name was Sagoonah, that she was about twenty-six years of age, that she had been left an orphan in her childhood, from which time she had been brought up about the person of Indora, Princess, and now Queen of Inderabad, an independent kingdom of Hindustan. She recollected that about sixteen years back, and consequently when she was only ten years old, an Englishman bearing the name of Clement Redcliffe arrived at the court of Inderabad. He was in the East India Company's service, and came to that court as an accredited diplomatic agent on the part of the governor-general. The King of Inderabad, for his own reasons, detained the Englishman at his court, and caused a rumour of his death in the jungles to be propagated in other parts of India, so that it might reach the ears of the British functionaries at Calcutta. Sagoonah proceeded to state that the Englishman was treated with all possible distinction at the court of Inderabad, his freedom alone excepted. He had sumptuous apartments assigned him in a pavilion attached to the royal palace; he had slaves

to minister unto him, a guard of honour to attend him, and riches were showered upon him. Those around him were expressly ordered by the king to address him with the respect due to a noble of the highest rank. He was the preceptor of the Princess Indora, whom he instructed in all European accomplishments, and whom he converted to Christianity. He was likewise the king's privy councillor, and was the means of introducing a multiplicity of reforms into the institutions of the country. All these were of the most liberal tendency, and thus, although he was known to be an Englishman and a Christian, he was a universal favourite with every grade of society in the kingdom of Inderabad. He was always addressed as if he himself were a prince, and it was generally believed that he would espouse the Princess Indora, and become monarch of the country whenever the old king should die.

It must be observed that Sagoonah related these facts in order to give her narrative as much precision as possible; but that likewise much of the information she imparted was elicited from her by questions, while the rest was spontaneously afforded from her lips.

She proceeded to depose that the Englishman Clement Redcliffe frequently implored his freedom, but could not obtain it. Thus years passed on. At length, in the year 1845, an incident occurred which made Sagoonah acquainted with some portion of his former history. It appeared that an English traveller was found murdered in a wood in the neighbourhood of the capital, and amongst the documents discovered on his person was a London newspaper. This newspaper fell into the hands of the Englishman Clement Redcliffe. On that very same day Sagoonah was walking in the Court of Fountains belonging to the palace of Inderabad, when she was the unseen witness of a meeting on the part of the Englishman and the Princess Indora. The Englishman threw himself at the feet of her Highness, imploring that she would intercede with her royal father to procure his freedom. He said that everything which regarded his native country had hitherto been a perfect blank to him, but that the newspaper which had now fallen into his hands contained a paragraph bearing allusion to his own family, and to his horror tending to criminate him in respect to a murder which he never even knew had been committed at all. He

mentioned the name of the Duke of Marchmont; he mentioned his own real name of Bertram Vivian. His language was passionate and vehement, and she (Sagoonah) thought he scarcely knew what he was saying at the time. Sagoonah continued to depose that she herself during this interview remained concealed behind a group of shrubs, and that her presence there was not suspected by either the Englishman or the princess. She never told either what she had overheard, but treasured it up in her own bosom. The Englishman's freedom was not accorded him, but some time afterward he escaped from Inderabad. Then the princess determined upon coming to England, and Sagoonah agreed to be her companion. Since they were in England, and very recently, Sagoonah had listened at the door when the prisoner and Indora were conversing together, and she had heard enough to establish the conviction in her mind that he whom she had so long known by the name of Clement Redcliffe was none other than Bertram Vivian, or, more properly, Lord Clandon.

"And the prisoner in the dock," said the magistrate, inquiringly, "is the same person of whom you are speaking?"

Now it was that Sagoonah turned her large coal-black eyes upon Lord Clandon, and they vibrated with that lustre which on former occasions had struck him as so sinister, and which had subsequently haunted him for a period afterward. That look which she thus bent upon him was full of a fiendish satisfaction, of a hatred which had succeeded a once all-potent love, and as she again turned her regards toward the magistrate, she said, in a firm voice, "It is he."

"When you first addressed me this afternoon," said the inspector, "you entered into very minute details in respect to the murder which took place in the year 1829. Perhaps you have some explanation to give on that point?"

Sagoonah hesitated for a few instants, and then she said, in the same cold, calm voice as before, "I have no objection to explain that subject. My royal mistress procured numerous volumes of an English newspaper called the *Times*, and I availed myself of opportunities to read therein the history of the murder at Oaklands. It was thus that I was enabled to follow up the clue which I had previously obtained in India, and to understand how it was that the prisoner had so long borne a false name."

"Mr. Coleman," asked the magistrate, "do you desire to put any questions to this witness?"

"None, sir," was the reply. "She best knows the reason that has led her to the perpetration of this black deed of treachery, and she may be left to the punishment of her own conscience."

These last words seemed to strike the ayah most forcibly, for she gave a convulsive start, she gasped as if about to say something, and then staggering back from the witness-box, she sank upon the seat a little way in the rear.

"Prisoner," said the magistrate, "have you anything to allege wherefore you should not be committed for trial?"

"I have promised," replied Lord Clandon, firmly, "to leave myself in the hands of my legal adviser."

Mr. Coleman thereupon rose, and addressed the magistrate in the following manner:

"Sir, I am perfectly well aware that you have no alternative but to commit for trial the nobleman who stands before you. But I have already stated that I wish public opinion to be suspended until a better opportunity shall serve for the complete investigation of this unfortunate and intricate affair. Rest assured, sir, that if my client shall reiterate in another place that declaration of innocence which I now make for him here, it is with a fervid reliance upon the justice of that Heaven which may unravel those intricacies that human hands, if unassisted, cannot possibly disentangle. On the present occasion, sir, no more will be said on behalf of the prisoner."

The magistrate then formally decreed the committal of Lord Clandon for trial, and the prisoner walked forth with a firm step to the cab which was to convey him to Newgate.

Meanwhile Sagoonah had glided away from the court, availing herself of an opportunity when Lord Clandon was again whispering a few words in the ear of the faithful Mark relative to the manner in which he was to break to Queen Indora the intelligence of his calamity.

We must now return to the Duke of Marchmont, whom we left at the moment he issued from the lawyer's office, leaving Armytage behind. The nobleman had not in the first instance arrived there in his carriage; he had been on horseback to see Madame Angelique, and from her villa he had ridden over straight to Bedford Row, his groom holding

his horse while he was in Mr. Coleman's office. On coming forth thence, he dismissed the groom, with an intimation that he purposed to proceed on foot; but it struck the domestic that there was a strange, half-wild, half-vacant expression on his ducal master's countenance.

And well might it be so, for the soul of the Duke of Marchmont was a perfect pandemonium at that instant. He walked on through the adjacent squares; he felt as if he were intoxicated, yet without any of the exhilarating effects which wine produces. There was an awful consternation in his brain, and never was he more bewildered than at present how to act. There were reasons which seemed to induce him to fly from the country, and yet he had not the power to take any decisive step. He longed for some one whom he could consult, to whom he could tell everything, who might become the depositor of the stupendous secrets that lay heavy as lead upon his soul, but where was he to find such a friend? All of a sudden he recollected that his brother, his own brother, must at that moment be undergoing an examination at a police office, and he experienced a feverish, a burning desire to ascertain the result. No, not exactly the result, for he felt convinced that this must be a committal for trial; but it closely concerned the duke's interest to learn what had transpired at the examination. He called a cab, and proceeded to a hotel in Covent Garden, where he asked for a private room and ordered dinner.

Oh, well may the reader imagine that this order was only given for form's sake, but the wretched Duke of Marchmont was unable to partake of a morsel. Food appeared to stick in his throat, wine seemed to suffocate him. He longed to ask the waiter certain questions, but each time the domestic entered, the duke's courage failed him; he dreaded to hear something terrible in respect to himself. At length, looking at his watch, he found that it was seven o'clock, and feeling convinced that the examination must be by that time over, he could no longer endure the horrible state of suspense in which he was plunged. He therefore mustered up his courage to address the waiter, who he perceived did not know him, inasmuch as he called him " sir."

" Is there not some important examination going on close by, at Bow Street? " inquired the duke, with an almost supernatural effort to command his composure.

"Yes, sir," answered the waiter. "They say that Lord Clandon has just been committed for trial, for the murder of his uncle, about nineteen years ago."

"I heard something about it as I came along," said the duke, endeavouring to sip his wine with an easy nonchalant air, but he again felt as if it would choke him. "Has anything particular transpired? I mean did the prisoner make any confession, or did he deny — "

"The proceedings were not long, sir," answered the waiter. "Only two witnesses were examined, the inspector and a Hindu woman, and all the evidence went dead against his lordship. I believe his lordship's solicitor denied the charge, but beyond that no defence was offered. You perhaps know, sir, that Lord Clandon is the Duke of Marchmont's brother? "

The duke made no response, he could not; and the waiter, thinking that he cared no more for the topic of conversation, issued from the room.

The duke began to breathe more freely, and he said within himself, "It is clear that without the evidence of Travers they can do nothing. Will he remain stanch, or will he — will he betray everything? The wretch, to have perpetrated forgery! "

Another quick revulsion took place in the Duke of Marchmont's feelings, the momentary idea of safety flitted away, and as he thought of Armytage a horrible sense of danger again smote him. That the ruined speculator was entirely in Coleman's power was but too evident, and that the lawyer would use this power, the duke felt frightfully convinced. He was now once more goaded to utter desperation; he rose from his seat. White as a corpse, haggard and ghastly, he paced to and fro in the room. He thought of flight, and he thought of suicide, but he dreaded lest by adopting the former course he should only be precipitating his own utter downfall, and throwing away the last chance of escape, while in respect to suicide, he had not the moral courage.

Suddenly an idea struck him. It was an idea that arose from desperation's self, but no sooner had it entered his brain than he clutched at it greedily. Ringing the bell, he ordered the waiter to give him his bill and call a cab. On entering the vehicle he said to the driver, "To Newgate."

Away sped the cab, and it was followed by another, containing the lawyer's clerk who had been appointed to watch

him, for Mr. Price was keen and shrewd, and was not likely to disobey nor neglect his master's mandates. In twenty minutes the cab which bore the duke drew up in front of Newgate, and his Grace alighting, knocked at the door of the governor's house. On giving his name, he was at once ushered into a room, where the governor received him with mingled sympathy and respect.

" This is a dreadful thing, my lord," said the prison functionary, who was by no means astonished to see Marchmont looking so pale, haggard, and agitated; " but it is an event for which your Grace must have been for long years more or less prepared, as it might have happened at any moment, — although, I believe, your Grace fancied your brother to be dead? "

" I come to see that unhappy brother of mine," interrupted the duke. " Show me to his cell, and let me be alone with him."

It was contrary to the gaol regulations to admit visitors to prisoners at that late hour in the evening, but on behalf of a duke all such restrictions were readily set aside. The governor therefore at once obeyed with alacrity, and he conducted Marchmont along the gloomy corridors toward the cell which Lord Clandon now tenanted. The massive door swung upon its hinges; a single candle was burning inside, and by the dim light Lord Clandon was discovered sleeping on the humble pallet. Yes, he was sleeping after the exhausting circumstances of the day, and he slept serenely, too, with no convulsing starts, with no tossing nor heaving on the bolster, with no flinging about of the arms. The governor closed the door, without bolting it, having intimated to his Grace that he would wait at the extremity of the corridor.

The Duke of Marchmont stood by the side of the pallet, looking down upon the sleeping countenance of his brother. That brother was sleeping, as we have said, serenely, and the duke murmured to himself, " Would to Heaven that I could slumber like him! Bertram! " and he placed his hand upon his brother's shoulder.

Lord Clandon opened his eyes, and on beholding the duke he started slightly for an instant, then rising from the pallet, he said, coldly, " What seek you with me? "

" Bertram, how can you ask this question? " exclaimed

the duke, adopting a reproachful look and tone. "Am I not your brother?"

"I have no brother," replied Lord Clandon, and for a moment his chest heaved as if with a convulsing sob. "No, I have not a brother. I had once a brother, whom I loved dearly and devotedly, but — but — that time has long passed, and for nineteen years," added Bertram, fixing his eyes significantly upon the duke, "there has been no one in the world whom I could call my brother."

"Bertram, your brain is turned," said Marchmont. "Pray listen to me. Gold doubtless can procure your escape. I will lavish it by thousands, by hundreds of thousands, if needful — "

"No more!" ejaculated Bertram, in a peremptory tone. "If all the doors stood open, and no one barred my egress, I would not go hence. My destiny shall be fulfilled. I know what it is; I believe in God, I have faith in His justice. And now enough. Leave me."

"No, no, I cannot leave you thus," cried the Duke of Marchmont, easily converting his real agitation into a semblance of profound grief. "What horrible thoughts, Bertram, have you in your head? Why is your conduct thus unnatural towards me? Why did you appear before me at Oaklands, to scare me with the idea that I beheld one from the dead? Oh, you must escape, you must fly hence, you must betake yourself to some foreign country. All my fortune is at your disposal. I will beggar myself to ensure your welfare."

"Leave me, I say," answered Bertram, who was evidently struggling with violent internal emotions; "leave me, I insist."

The duke was bewildered how to act. There was a moment when he was about to fall upon his knees, to entreat, to implore, to give utterance to all the wild things which were agitating in his brain, but yet he dared not. He again looked at his brother; the prisoner's countenance now was cold, stern, and implacable, and as Marchmont hesitated what to do, Lord Clandon extended his arm toward the door, exclaiming, "Begone! I know you not as a brother."

It seemed to be by a sort of mechanical involuntary process that the Duke of Marchmont obeyed the mandate and slunk away from Bertram's presence. The governor came hastily

along the stone corridor to turn the massive key and fasten the heavy bolts which secured in his cell that captive who, nevertheless, would not have issued forth if every door of the prison had stood open.

"I hope, my lord," said the governor, in a low, sympathizing voice, "that your unfortunate brother was grateful for this visit?"

"Do not question me," replied the duke, petulantly. "Which is the way out?" for the very atmosphere of that prison seemed horribly oppressive to the wretched Marchmont.

"This way, my lord," said the governor. "It was toward one of the condemned cells that your Grace was hastening—"

The duke could scarcely repress a cry of anguished terror at the words which had just smitten his ear, and he rushed into the diverging passage, as if wildly anxious to escape from the air he was now breathing. The governor of course attributed all this display of powerful emotions on the duke's part to a sense of affliction on his brother's account, and he begged his Grace to walk into his parlour and take some refreshment. But the duke gave no response, and issuing from the gaol, flung himself into the cab, in a state of mind that need not to have been envied by any wretch ever coming forth from that same prison to perish on the black scaffold erected outside.

The driver asked whither he should proceed, and the duke answered, unconscious of the reply which he was giving. He had mentioned Belgrave Square, and thither the cab accordingly went. Mr. Price, Coleman's clerk, still followed at a little distance, until he at length beheld the duke enter his own mansion in Belgrave Square, from all the windows of which a flood of lustre was pouring forth, for there was a grand entertainment at Marchmont House that evening.

The duchess was receiving the élite of the aristocracy, and the splendid saloons were thrown open for the accommodation of the numerous guests. There was dancing in the state apartment, there was play in the card-rooms, and the picture-galleries, brilliantly lighted, were the resorts of the loungers from the saloons themselves. The intelligence of Lord Clandon's arrest had only just reached the mansion; it began to be rumoured amongst the domestics, but to the company it was as yet unknown. When the duke alighted from the

common hack-cab, and, pale, haggard, and ghastly, entered the spacious hall, the numerous lackeys assembled there naturally supposed, as the governor of Newgate had done, that his Grace's appearance was produced by the intense affliction he experienced on his brother's behalf.

" What, is there company here to-night? " he inquired, in a wild, vacant manner, of one of the footmen.

" Yes, my lord. Your Grace must remember that this was the evening fixed for the occasion. But shall I inform her Grace that your lordship has returned? "

" No, no, not now," responded Marchmont, impatiently; and reeling around like a drunken man, he issued forth from the palatial residence.

The domestics looked at each other, shaking their heads half-ominously, half-compassionately, as if they feared he had gone mad.

The duke entered another cab, and ordered the driver to take him to the Regent's Park. There he stopped at the door of Mr. Armytage's house, and knocked an impatient summons.

" Is Mr. Armytage at home? " he inquired of the footman who speedily made his appearance.

" No, my lord," was the reply, " Mr. Armytage has gone into the country."

" Into the country? " ejaculated Marchmont. " Impossible! I left him this afternoon — "

" It is quite true, my lord," rejoined the footman. " Mr. Armytage came just now in a cab, along with another gentleman; he did not get out, but ordered a few necessaries to be put into a carpet-bag, and when it was brought to him, he said he was going away for some little time. He did not know for how long, but said that he should write and say when he was coming home again."

" And who was that other gentleman? " inquired Marchmont, eagerly.

" I could not see, my lord," answered the servant, " for it was quite dark, and master was in such a hurry — "

The duke tarried to hear no more, but turned abruptly away from the door and reëntered the cab. Twice did the driver ask him whither he was now to proceed, without receiving any reply, but on the third occasion of putting the question, he elicited the monosyllable, " Home," which was abruptly jerked forth.

The duke knew not what to think of this sudden departure of Armytage. He could not flatter himself that Armytage had contrived to settle with Mr. Coleman and get out of his clutches, without having to make the revelations which had been sought from his lips, for if it were so, Armytage would have been to him to claim the promised reward. On the other hand, the wretched duke's fears suggested that Armytage was kept in a sort of custody by Coleman, in order to be brought forward to give his evidence when the trial should take place. Indeed, Marchmont was in that state of mind in which he dared hope nothing, but was forced to tremble at everything, and the most grovelling beggar in the streets was in the enjoyment of an Elysian state of mind in comparison with this bearer of a ducal coronet.

On reaching Marchmont House, the duke was found in a fainting state in the cab; he was borne to his apartment, and was soon raving in the delirium of fever.

Meanwhile the intelligence had spread amongst the guests that Lord Clandon was arrested and committed for trial; the duchess was most painfully affected. She received the sympathies of her friends, and the brilliant assemblage broke up prematurely, the grand supper that was provided remaining untouched.

And now Lavinia was called upon to administer by the side of that couch on which her husband was raving madly with the brain's fiery fever.

CHAPTER VI

REMORSE

Return we to Sagoonah, whom we left issuing from the police office after she had heard the magistrate pronounce the committal of Lord Clandon to Newgate.

We have seen that the words pronounced by the attorney, to the effect that the ayah might be left to the chastisement of her own conscience, had produced a sudden and powerful impression upon her mind. It was one of those species of menaces which, being thrown out in certain circumstances, touch a particular chord in the heart, and cause it to vibrate painfully. Thus was it with Sagoonah. Love may turn to hate, but when a hatred, so engendered, wreaks its vengeance, it is all the more susceptible of a speedy and poignant remorse. And thus again was it with Sagoonah. She went forth from the police office, and the memory of that threat haunted her. It appeared to have fastened upon her brain, it clung to her like a curse.

She wandered on, unconscious as well as reckless of the way which she was taking; the excruciations of remorse were strengthening within her soul. She thought of how devotedly she had loved Clement Redcliffe, of how gloriously handsome he was when first she knew him, and of the kindness with which he was wont to speak to her. She thought of that royal mistress who had loved her, who had made her a confidante, who had ever treated her with so much affectionate tenderness, and who had even passed days and nights by the side of her couch when redeeming her from that death which might have otherwise ensued from the blow dealt by the assassin's knife. Of all these things Sagoonah thought, and her soul was rent with bitterest remorse for the deed of which she had been guilty.

She knew that the penalty of murder is death, and without pausing to estimate or conjecture the value of Lord Clandon's denial of the charge, she was only too painfully assured that he would be pronounced guilty. She would now have given worlds to recall what she had done; she had suddenly recovered, as it were, from the access of frenzy, the madness, in which she had taken so frightful a step against him. She pictured to herself all the horrors of the scaffold, and though she had never witnessed a public execution, yet her morbid imagination not merely conjured up all the real horrors thereof, but supplied fanciful ones to enhance the mental agony with which she was inspired. She awoke likewise, as it were, to a consciousness of her own position. She was penniless, she was houseless; she had renounced a happy home, had deserted a kind mistress, and had brought herself to the point of wanting food. Still suffering from her recent illness, she was now enfeebled and exhausted; she felt the gnawings of famine within her, and she had not a penny to purchase a morsel of bread. Her situation was in itself an almost adequate punishment for the foul, vindictive treachery of which she had been culpable.

And remorse on one subject brought its companion-compunctions upon other points. Her conscience told her that she had been a murderess in inclination, although Heaven had intervened to frustrate her plans. She had sought the life of her mistress with the bright-pointed steel and likewise by means of the reptile of deadliest venom, — that kind mistress who had ever been so affectionate toward her. Remorse on this account was now lacerating her heart and rending her brain. Her imagination was full of horrors; vainly did she endeavour to dispel them. It seemed as if her mental gaze perforce remained fixed upon the most hideous objects, — ghastly spectres that hemmed her in around, circled about her, stood in her way, and laid their death-cold hands upon her. And the evil spirits of her own creed likewise presented their phantom-forms to her vision, — forms of the dreadfulest aspect. She was burning in the fires of her own tortured conscience; she was seething in a lake of molten lava conjured up by her own fevered imagination. Though living, and upon earth, it appeared as if she were suffering the excruciations of hell itself.

And thus wandered on the wretched Sagoonah through

the streets of London, experiencing an awful solitude in the midst of that crowded metropolis, feeling that she was a wretch to whom death would be welcome. But that death, how could she meet it? by what means was she to encounter it?

In the agony of her remorse she resolved to return to the villa. Yes, to this her mind was suddenly made up. She thought that it would be an atonement if she were to fling herself at the feet of her mistress, and confess everything, — although whatsoever she had to confess she knew had been principally revealed during her ravings on the bed of sickness. But all her thoughts were morbid; her mind had utterly lost its wholesome strength, and it was now preoccupied with the idea that there would be atonement in the project she had formed. Oh, if she could only obtain the forgiveness of her mistress, it would be some balm to her heart, and she might at least die less miserably than she otherwise would.

And thus she proceeded toward the villa. But it was no longer with the hurried step of excitement that Sagoonah bent her way; worn down by fatigue and by mental suffering, she dragged herself along painfully. The lithe bayadere form was not now drawn up to its full height, the well-shaped feet no longer pressed the ground with elastic tread. It was as a miserable wretch, with the cares of a universe upon her shoulders, pressing like an intolerable weight, that the anguished Sagoonah was now making her painful way.

Meanwhile the faithful Mark, having taken a cab on leaving the police office, had reached the villa. Queen Indora was anxiously awaiting his return, for she had a presentiment, ay, even a certainty of evil. Indeed it was but too evident that Sagoonah had been playing a darkly treacherous game, and that she meditated some additional perfidy. It will be remembered that immediately after the ayah had received her wound from the Burker's weapon, Lord Clandon and Indora, in a consultation together, had come to the conclusion that the one tremendous secret relating to himself had been fathomed by Sagoonah, and hence those porings over the *Times* of which Christina Ashton had given them information. Now, therefore, the queen dreaded lest Sagoonah, in her jealous vindictiveness, should betray Lord Clandon's secret, and she had written a note to put him on his guard, — that note which, as we have seen, Mark was unable to deliver ere

the crowning mischief was accomplished. Therefore it was with intense anxiety that the queen awaited Mark's return, and the instant she beheld him approaching through the grounds, she hurried forth to meet him. Though the faithful majordomo had intended to break the dreadful intelligence as delicately and gently as possible, yet he could not control the expression of his countenance, and the unspeakable sadness that it wore at once convinced Indora that the very worst had happened.

"Tell me instantaneously what has occurred," she said. "Delay not, — think not that you do me a service by studying my feelings. Your features betray the tale. I understand it all."

"Alas, my lady," said the faithful dependent, "that I should be compelled to become the bearer of intelligence so frightful — "

"Come in, Mark," said the queen, "and give me all the details."

She had not shrieked, she had not swooned; she gave no vent to passionate lamentations, but there was something unnatural in her calmness. The strength of her mind was sustained by a hope which was the one barrier that separated her from utter despair. That hope was the eventual demonstration of Lord Clandon's innocence.

She conducted Mark into a room, where they were alone together, and he told her everything that had occurred. She listened without interrupting him, and when he had finished his narrative of the proceedings, she rose from her seat, saying, "I will now go and comfort him in his prison."

"Pardon me, my lady," said Mark, "but this evening it cannot be. The regulations of the prison will prevent it. Lord Clandon desired me to implore your ladyship to postpone this visit until to-morrow, and then to repair thither under circumstances of the strictest privacy, so that your ladyship's name may not become inconveniently involved."

"I understand," said the queen; "it shall be for to-morrow. And now Mark, my faithful Mark, no time is to be lost in carrying out the plans which circumstances dictate. You must set off immediately for Oaklands, the country-seat of the Duke of Marchmont; you must privately obtain an interview with an old man named Purvis, and you must give him a letter which I am about to write."

Mark promised to do the bidding of his royal mistress in all things, and, furnished with a letter, he lost no time in taking his departure. When he was gone the queen sought Christina.

Our youthful heroine was overwhelmed with grief on account of Sagoonah's flight, inasmuch as Indora had given her to understand that the direst calamity to Mr. Redcliffe might be the result, for Christina had yet to learn that her brother's benefactor bore a lordly title. The queen had assured Christina that she acquitted her of all blame in reference to Sagoonah's escape, but still the maiden reproached herself for not having exercised a sufficient degree of vigilance. Indora found her weeping in her chamber, and before she broke the fatal tidings, she renewed her declaration that Christina was utterly absolved from all blame on the one point which so sorely troubled her. Then the sad intelligence was imparted, and Christina learned for the first time all the mysteries which had hitherto attached themselves to him whom she had only known as Mr. Redcliffe. Wild was the anguish of our heroine on hearing how terribly the queen's presentiment was fulfilled, and how stupendous was the mischief which had resulted from Sagoonah's escape.

Christian Ashton now arrived at the villa. He had been passing some hours with Isabella Vincent; he had returned to Mortimer Street at the usual hour for dinner, and there he learned from Mrs. Macaulay the terrible event which had taken place, and the rumour of which had just reached the landlady. Half-frantic on his benefactor's account, and firmly convinced of his innocence, — although until this moment he had ever believed in Bertram Vivian's guilt, — Christian sped to Bow Street; but the case was over, and Lord Clandon had been removed to Newgate. Christian, in a state of mind bordering upon frenzy, proclaimed his intention of hastening to the prison to see his benefactor, but he was assured that it was too late that day to obtain admittance. He therefore sped to the villa, which he reached at the moment when the queen had finished her sad narrative to Christina.

The three, namely, her Majesty and the twins, were now grouped together in an apartment on the ground floor, and they were conversing in deep mournfulness on the one engrossing topic.

" But we must not despair," said the queen, " for God is powerful and just, and he will make the innocence of our friend apparent. Gradually for a long time past have incidents been developing themselves toward this end, and the sudden explosion of to-day may prove, after all, a necessary link in the chain, according to the inscrutable decrees of Heaven. Oh, no, we must not despair."

The twins gathered comfort from Indora's words, and it moreover occurred to them that she entertained hopes and projects which she did not deem it requisite at that instant to make known. There was a long interval of silence, and the lamp which was burning upon the table shone upon the three mournful countenances of those who were in that room; for notwithstanding the hope which Indora cherished, and the partial consolation her language had infused into the hearts of the twins, they all continued to feel deeply the position in which Lord Clandon was placed.

The front door of the villa was standing open, and it now struck the queen and the twins that the handle of the door of the room itself was agitated. They looked in that direction; the door opened slowly, and Christina at once recognized the dress which had been purloined from her own chamber.

" Sagoonah! " was the ejaculation which in mingled horror and astonishment burst from her lips.

" Yes, it is I, the wretched, the guilty Sagoonah," said the Hindu woman, as she advanced into the room.

She flung off the borrowed bonnet which she wore, and as the light of the lamp fell upon her countenance, it showed that a ghastly expression sat upon the natural duskiness of her complexion. Christian and Christina had started up from their seats in disgust and abhorrence toward the vile authoress of the calamity which had stricken their friend; Queen Indora was rendered speechless with amazement at the presence of one who she thought would never seek to behold her countenance again.

" Lady," said Sagoonah, advancing toward the queen, " as you hope for mercy in the next world, have mercy upon me in this."

" Sagoonah," replied Indora, coldly, and almost sternly, " there are deeds beyond all pardon, and you have been guilty of one to-day. Depart hence, for if you linger, it

will be only to provoke me to wreak a vengeance upon you."

"Lady, if you would kill me," answered the ayah, in a voice expressive of utter misery, "you would be rendering me a service, at the same time that you would be inflicting a most righteous doom. You cannot loathe me more than I loathe myself; you cannot hold me in greater abhorrence than I am self-abhorred in the intensity of my own feelings. I have been mad, but now I have become lucid, and the clearness of my mind is horrible. Through the deep, clear waters of the rivers in our own native land have I beheld hideous monsters agitating in those profundities, and thus on looking down into the depths of my own soul do I discern things that appal and shock and horrify me. Although I must suffer terribly hereafter, I am suffering terribly now. There is a hell upon earth, and this hell has commenced with me. Now, lady, can you not have pity upon me, — you who are so good, so generous, so merciful?"

There was an indescribable anguish in Sagoonah's tone, a kindred agony in her looks. Her large coal-black eyes appeared to burn with the fearful fires that were consuming her within, and their terrific lustre played like flashes about her brows, as if she had received a portion of the doom endured by the fallen angels in that pandemonium to which the blasting lightnings of Heaven had hurled them down. Christian and Christina looked on, appalled, dismayed, yet full of intensest loathing and horror, as if upon the corpse of one who had died of the plague and had come to bring its hideous infection unto them. Queen Indora rose from her seat; there was a deathlike pallor upon the delicate duskiness of her complexion, but her aspect was cold, stern, and implacable.

"Sagoonah," she said, "it is impossible I can pardon you. There breathes not upon earth a more guilty creature than yourself. I look upon you as something more hideous, more envenomed, and more dangerous than the very reptile which some time back you brought into the house that it might deal death to me with its poisoned fangs."

"Yes, lady, I merit these reproaches," replied Sagoonah, "and I know that you are acquainted with all my guilt. I am not ignorant that amidst the ravings of delirium my crimes were revealed. But, oh, suffer me to make the fullest

confession now, to detail everything in connection with the past, to describe the workings of my morbid, maddened mind during the various stages of my iniquity, — suffer me to do all this, and my conscience will be eased. Then breathe from your lips a single word of pardon, and you will be conferring a mercy upon a fellow creature who is truly penitent."

"What have you to confess that is not already known to me, vile woman?" demanded the queen. "Oh, if you knew how your presence is loathsome to me!"

"It must be, for my iniquity is immense," responded Sagoonah, with despair still in her accents and ineffable misery in her looks. "But is there to be no pardon on earth for the sinner, however great that sinner's crime, and when the contrition is commensurate?"

"Speak. What have you to confess?" asked Indora.

"You know not, lady, the temptation which led me on," proceeded the ayah. "I will not speak of the love which was potent even to madness, but I will speak of the manner in which it prompted me to lend a too willing ear to the words of a fiend in female shape who was sent to tempt me. That woman was Madame Angelique."

Sagoonah then proceeded to relate everything which had at any time occurred between herself and the infamous Frenchwoman, but which we need not recapitulate to the reader, though it may be as well to remind him how Madame Angelique had instigated the ayah to make attempts upon the life of her royal mistress, and how through Sagoonah's intervention she had attained access to Indora on that occasion when she proposed to the Eastern lady the visit to the Duke of Marchmont's seat of Oaklands. The queen was by no means astonished at what she now heard, for Sagoonah's ravings had prepared her for intelligence of this kind; but to Christian and Christina everything was as novel as it was astounding and horrifying. They listened as if it were to some hideous tale of murder avowed in a condemned cell, and as they sat together, the sister clung to her twin brother as if to be by him shielded and protected from some danger that might befall her. As for Indora herself, she listened with a settled cold sternness of look, — a look such as that splendidly handsome countenance had never worn before.

It was at first in the deepest mournfulness that Sagoonah had begun her confessions, but as she proceeded, she grew

excited; she interrupted herself with frequent appeals for pity, she gave vent to passionate entreaties for pardon. Her self-upbraidings and her declarations of penitence produced an alternation between an almost frenzied exaltation and a profound pathos.

" Oh, it is all true that I have told you, lady," she cried, at the conclusion, " and you see how that fiend of a Frenchwoman appealed to me through the medium of my weakest points to attempt all these enormities. Perhaps you may understand her motives better than I, and, oh, leave her not unpunished, for she is one of those instruments of whom the Evil Spirit makes use to whisper dreadful temptations in the ears of individuals reduced to despair. Ah! that story of the snake, I know that it is scarcely credible, and yet it is all as I have narrated it. I myself shudder as I at present retrospect over the frightful details. You must remember well the day on which you took Miss Ashton and myself to the beautiful gardens containing the wild beasts, the strange birds, and the horrible reptiles? But I will show you how I brought the envenomed cobra to the villa. Oh, I am so anxious to prove that everything I am telling your ladyship is correct."

It was with the most profound excitement that Sagoonah thus spoke. In the distressed, the anguished, and the morbid state of her mind she continued to cling to the idea that by her present conduct she was veritably making an atonement for her past misdeeds, and she therefore considered it above all things necessary that she could convince the queen of her statements in every one of their minutest details. Inspired with this idea, she repeated with excited ejaculation, " Yes, I will show your ladyship how I brought the hideous reptile hither."

Thus speaking, Sagoonah suddenly burst from the room.

" Whither is she going? " cried Christina, affrighted at the vehemence of her manner. " She is frenzied."

The queen's first impulse was to command that the ayah should not be allowed to penetrate into any other part of the villa, but on a second thought she said, " Let her have her own way; the more perfect she renders her history the better perhaps will it serve my own purposes. One revelation leads to another, and we will let hers be complete."

" What frightful things have we been hearing! " exclaimed

Christina, with a shudder; " and though many of them were but the detailed repetition of much that we knew before — "

" Yet it is horrible for you, my dear young friends," added the queen, compassionatingly, as she looked upon the twins, " to hear them in this elaborate and minute form."

Sagoonah at this moment reëntered the room, bringing with her that small leathern case, or bag, which had served her purpose for the transport of the cobra di capello from the Zoological Gardens to the villa. It was of Hindu manufacture, and we have already described it as being large enough to contain a small rabbit. It had a cover which lapped over the mouth and was fastened with a button. Sagoonah had been up to her own chamber to fetch it.

" Here," she exclaimed, as she reëntered the apartment where she had left the queen and the twins, " here is the instrument which served my accursed purpose on that dread day."

Then, in the same vehement and impassioned strain, she went on to describe how she had captured the cobra in the leathern case, and how she suffered it to escape thence into the couch of her mistress. The twins shuddered with a cold horror, as if the actual proceeding itself were being now realized in their presence, and even the strong-minded Indora could not repel a similar sensation, though there was in her mind a deep feeling of thankfulness to Heaven for the manner in which she had escaped from the hideous peril.

" Yes," continued Sagoonah, displaying the leathern case with a species of frenzy, " it was this that brought the deadly reptile hither. Oh, would that it had darted its coils around my arm and plunged its fangs into my flesh! What remorse would have now been spared me! Wretch, wretch that I have been! But I swear to you, lady, that such is now my self-loathing, so intense is the abhorrence with which I now regard myself, so sick and wearied am I of life, that were the envenomed reptile still within this case, I would plunge in my hand. Thus, thus would I plunge it in, and if the serpent were torpid, I would excite it into its fullest and most terrible vitality. I would court its sting, and I would be thankful that I had the power so soon to perish."

As she thus spoke with impassioned and almost frenzied vehemency, Sagoonah tore open the lapping cover of the case, and thrust in her hand. It was no mere stage-perform-

ance to produce an effect; it was the action of one who was labouring under morbid feelings most acutely excited. And as she spoke of stirring up the reptile from its torpor, she passionately ground her hand down, as it were, into the case; she imitated what she would have done in the circumstances which she was supposing. Her white teeth gleamed betwixt the parting vermilion of her thin, well-cut lips, her eyes sparkled with unnatural fires. The twins thought she was going mad. Indora herself was about to use her authority and command her to be tranquil.

All of a sudden Sagoonah drew forth her hand from the case, which she immediately dropped, and then for an instant she contemplated the back of that hand with the most earnest scrutiny. She was seen to reel slightly, and then a cry as if of wild, half-frenzied, and terrible joy thrilled from her lips.

"Oh, I comprehend it," she exclaimed, sinking upon an ottoman, "and death is coming to me at last! Lady, you are avenged, and my contemplated crime has brought its own punishment. Oh, I am dying! — the deadly poison is even now circulating in my veins. That case — touch it not inside! Consign it to the fire — let it be consumed at once; there is death within! The serpent has left one of its venomed fangs there!"

A horrible light now flashed in unto the brains of the queen and the twins, and with a frightful clearness did they comprehend the ayah's meaning. Cries burst from their lips, as with one accord they sprang toward her. Indora lifted the ayah's hand, and a slight puncture, or, rather, scarcely perceptible scratch, from which a drop of blood had oozed forth, was visible upon the back of that hand.

"Oh, what can we do to save her?" cried Christina and her brother, as it were in the same breath.

"No earthly power can save her," answered the queen solemnly; "she must perish. Oh, Sagoonah, had you lived I could not have forgiven you, but now that death has fastened upon you, I assure you of my pardon."

The light of an unspeakable joy animated the dying ayah's countenance, and seizing with her unwounded hand one of the hands of her mistress, she pressed it fervently to her lips.

"May Heaven's choicest blessings, lady, alight upon your head," she exclaimed, "and may you yet be happy. Oh, something will yet arise to accomplish this happiness for

you! It is impossible that one so good and generous should be abandoned by Heaven. Ah, what balm has your words poured into my heart! I shall now welcome death, for I have received your pardon. The poison is circulating in my blood, I feel it, oh, I feel it! A film comes over my eyes. Place — place me upon the sofa."

The dying ayah's wish was at once complied with. Again she took the hand of her mistress and pressed it to her lips. From those lips the vermilion, habitually so vivid, was dying away, and the brilliant lustre of her eyes was yielding to the glaze of death.

" Will you pray, Sagoonah? " asked the queen; and kneeling down by the side of the sofa, she began reciting a prayer in her own native language.

The twins stood by, looking on with feelings of indescribable awe, Christina clinging to her brother, and he sustaining her with his arm thrown around her waist. For some minutes Sagoonah continued to repeat the prayer which the queen was uttering, but the voice of the ayah gradually grew lower and feebler, until it sank altogether.

The guilty but penitent Sagoonah was no more!

CHAPTER VII

MADAME ANGELIQUE AGAIN

It was the evening of the next day, and Sir Frederick Latham rode forth on horseback from his palatial mansion at Balham Hill. Completely happy now was the great City merchant in the confidence which subsisted between himself and his wife, the beautiful Anastatia, and that confidence had begun to engender love on both sides. Sir Frederick felt that he could not lavish too many proofs of his regard upon the wife whom he had so cruelly suspected, while she on her part was touched by the altered demeanour of her husband toward her. She comprehended that certain naturally generous feelings, which had long remained latent in the soul of a man entirely absorbed in worldly pursuits, had now been by accidental circumstances awakened, and though she was unselfish, yet as a woman she did her best to encourage them. Thus there was for this couple every prospect of a more real domestic happiness than they had ever before known, and Sir Frederick Latham could not altogether regret the circumstances which, though painful at the time, had given rise to this improved epoch in his wedded life.

It was a beautiful evening in the month of October; all the charms of a late autumn were prolonged, and the trees retained an unusual verdure for that season of the year. Sir Frederick and Anastatia had dined earlier than usual, in order that her ladyship might pay a visit to her mother, who continued to be somewhat indisposed; while the merchant himself, taking advantage of the loveliness of the evening, went forth for a ride on horseback. It happened that he was unattended by a groom on this occasion, for some reason which it is not worth while to describe. It was by accident,

and with no settled purpose in view, that Sir Frederick Latham rode in the direction of Brixton Hill, where, as it will be recollected, Madame Angelique's villa was situated.

But let us leave Sir Frederick for a few minutes, while we look into the interior of that villa.

Madame Angelique was seated at dessert, but her countenance bore the evidences of a certain inward trouble or uneasiness. It was clear that the milliner, on retiring from business, had not found the mental tranquillity which she had hoped to experience in the seclusion of her beautiful villa. Presently there was a knock at the door, and Mr. Shabolt was announced by the pretty parlour-maid, whose face expressed mingled anger and disgust, for she detested this visitor, and he had just taken the liberty of tapping her cheek in the hall. Mr. Shadbolt, as was now usual with him, had been dining luxuriantly, and it seemed as if the viands of which he had partaken had been washed down with a considerable amount of generous wine. Indeed it was in a state of semi-ebriety that he was thus introduced into Madame Angelique's presence.

"Well, what news?" he inquired, taking a seat, and at once filling a wine-glass for himself.

"It is singular that I have not seen the duke," replied Madame Angelique, rather in a musing tone to herself than exactly addressing her visitor.

"What duke? Your friend Marchmont of whom you so constantly speak?" he inquired.

"Yes. I forgot I had not seen you since he called yesterday. It was immediately after you left."

"Well, I can tell you," rejoined Shadbolt, "that the duke is lying in a desperate state at his house in Belgrave Square."

"Ah!" ejaculated Madame Angelique; and then she muttered to herself, "No wonder! no wonder!"

"I suppose you know," continued Shadbolt, "that his brother Lord Clandon suddenly turned up yesterday and was arrested?"

"Yes, I know it all," answered Madame Angelique. "I read the paragraph that was in this morning's paper, and the evening one," she added, glancing toward the *Globe*, which lay upon the sofa, "contains a longer account of what yesterday took place at Bow Street. It seems that

the very Mr. Coleman concerning whom you had been frightening me so — "

"Yes, the arrest took place at his office," said Shadbolt, speaking with his mouth full of cake, "and the duke himself was in the place at the time. There was a Hindu woman too — "

"I know it," interrupted Madame Angelique, curtly. "When the duke called upon me after you left the villa, yesterday, I told him all you had been saying to me."

"Well, and what then?" asked Shadbolt, with a momentary eagerness.

"Why, to speak plainly," responded the Frenchwoman, "the duke was not much inclined to believe that Coleman was a man who would accept a bribe of two hundred guineas to desist from prosecuting me. However, he said he would go and see Mr. Coleman on my behalf; and, as it must have happened, the duke's brother was there at the very same moment. So the inspector said in the account of the capture which he gave to the magistrate, and which is in the newspaper."

"But the duke did not come back to you, eh?" observed Mr. Shadbolt. "Well, all I can tell you is that if you hadn't given me that little douceur of two hundred guineas to slip into Coleman's hand — "

"I hope it is all right, and that you have not been deceiving me?" said Madame Angelique, looking very hard at Mr. Shadbolt.

"I deceive you?" he exclaimed. "What, honest Ike Shadbolt deceive his dear and intimate friend, the amiable and excellent Madame Angelique? Not I indeed! Look at me. Do I seem a man capable of playing such a dirty trick?"

"I hope not," responded the Frenchwoman, "and I hope likewise that everything is now safe in that quarter."

The reader will have no doubt comprehended that the unprincipled Shadbolt had been playing a trick by working on Madame Angelique's fears, in order to obtain the money of which he stood in need, for his extravagances were unlimited, and he had taken to gambling.

"You see, my dear friend," he continued, refilling his glass, and helping himself to another slice of cake, "all those lawyer fellows are open to bribes, and as Coleman

knows so much about you, we shall have to fee him occasionally. But what think you of letting me make an attempt in some other quarter, as a means of raising the wind?"

"No, never!" ejaculated Madame Angelique, firmly. "That business of the Lathams was enough for me. I never was so frightened in my life."

"Well, well," said Shadbolt, "just as you please. I must take myself off now; I just dropped in to inquire after your precious health, and tell you how nicely and comfortably I had settled that little affair with Coleman."

"But what of the Duke of Marchmont?" said Madame Angelique. "How did you learn —"

"That he was in so desperate a condition?" exclaimed Shadbolt. "Why, everybody at the West End is talking of it. It seems that he took on so about his brother, he went home in a state bordering on frenzy, and was seized with delirium. That is all I know. Ah! by the bye, there is something else I just now heard at the West End. The very Hindu woman we were talking of —"

"What of her?" demanded Madame Angelique, eagerly.

"She is dead," replied Shadbolt.

"Dead!" ejaculated the milliner.

"Yes, dead. Ah! by the bye," repeated Shadbolt, "I recollect you once asked me something about that Lady Indora with whom the Hindu woman lived."

"Yes, and you told me at the time that she was instigating Coleman to prosecute me."

"Did I? Well, I dare say it was so," observed Shadbolt, carelessly; for though sufficiently sharp, he had not a memory strong enough always to retain the recollection of the numerous perversions of truth or actual falsehoods to which he was prone.

"But about this Hindu woman, this Sagoonah?" said Madame Angelique.

"I could not exactly learn the rights of it," responded Shadbolt, "but there was a coroner's inquest on her body to-day, and it appears that it took place quiet enough. I was told, however, that the Hindu woman died from the scratch of a cobra's fang in a leather case in which she had brought the reptile with her over from India. The verdict

was 'Accidental death,' or something of that sort, and that's all I know of the business."

Mr. Shadbolt now took his departure, and the moment he was gone the pretty maid servant entered to complain to her mistress of the man's rude behaviour every time he visited the house. Madame Angelique was deeply indignant, for she had sought, as the reader has seen, to appear as "a saint" in her neighbourhood. She did not therefore like to have the discredit of receiving such an immoral person as the said Isaac Shadbolt at her house. She promised her parlour-maid to put a stop to his improprieties, and the girl was contented.

Madame Angelique was more than half-inclined to believe that Mr. Shadbolt had swindled her out of the two hundred guineas which he had alleged to be for the purpose of feeing Mr. Coleman, and the intelligence she had just received from her well-looking domestic aggravated her ill-feeling against Shadbolt. She inwardly anathematized the necessity of countenancing the visits of such an individual, and her thoughts being agitated, she went forth to cool her brain with the fresh air of the garden.

Madame Angelique was by no means astonished that the arrest of Lord Clandon should have produced such a powerful effect upon the Duke of Marchmont, for it will be remembered that his Grace had made certain unconscious revelations when he was at the ex-milliner's villa, after having experienced serious ill-treatment at the hands of the Burker. The Frenchwoman was glad that Sagoonah had passed out of this world, for she had ever trembled lest an investigation into the source of the murderous attack, which had been by mistake made upon the ayah, should lead to the exposure of antecedent circumstances, and thereby perilously drag in the name of Madame Angelique herself. But still, though that one cause of apprehension appeared to have been removed, the Frenchwoman was far from being tranquil in her mind. She believed that the tangled web which the Duke of Marchmont had woven might now probably be closing in around himself, and she had been so mixed up with many of his schemes and projects, — though at the time unconscious of how far she was being used as a mere instrument, and to what special aims his machinations were directed, — she trembled lest

there should be a general crash, which might involve herself in the ruins. And then, too, there was this Isaac Shadbolt, who wielded a sort of power over her, and who she saw but too plainly was resolved to use her purse as his own, who came to the house at all hours, insulted her servants, disgraced her with his intemperance, and feasted at her expense, — there was this man, we say, whom she could not shake off, and whose presence she loathed. Thus, altogether, the ex-milliner found, as we have before stated, that on abandoning her business and retiring to her beautiful suburban villa, she had not alighted on a bed of roses.

She felt the want of fresh air, and therefore had she wandered forth into her grounds. She strolled through the garden, at the back of the house, and passed into a little paddock which lay beyond. It was a beautifully clear evening, and there was a bracing vigour in the air. Still it scarcely refreshed the heated cheeks and throbbing brows of the Frenchwoman, for presentiments of evil were in her mind. As she was walking through the paddock, her ear caught the sounds of some equipage in the adjoining lane, but the trees prevented her from immediately distinguishing what it was, and she moreover bestowed but little thought upon the circumstance. Indeed, so much absorbed was she in her own reflections, she failed to notice that the equipage had stopped at a little distance.

Presently a break in the trees revealed the equipage to her view, and she saw that it was a post-chaise. At the same instant she heard footsteps advancing toward her from behind, and turning around, she beheld two coarsely dressed men approaching. They were attired as labourers, each carrying a stick in his hand. Madame Angelique was frightened, for she recollected that her men servants were out on some business connected with the stable, and the situation of the villa was sufficiently lonely to justify her apprehension. A scream was about to peal from her lips, when one of the men said to her, in a resolute voice, "We want you, and you must come along with us. All disturbance will be useless."

Whereupon the speaker seized her by the arm, while his companion caught her by the waist, both alike forbidding her at her peril from crying out. The ex-milliner however screamed, and then a hand was instaneously placed over

"SIR FREDERICK STRUCK HIM TO THE GROUND"

Photogravure from original by Bird

"SIR FREDERICK STRUCK HIM TO THE GROUND"
Photogravure from original by Bird

J.E. Bird '06

her mouth, while one of the men exclaimed in her ear, "It is in the Duke of Marchmont's affair that you are wanted."

This announcement at once paralyzed Madame Angelique, and an awful consternation seized upon her. But at that instant some one was seen bounding toward the spot, and Sir Frederick Latham made his appearance on the scene.

Without pausing to inquire into the nature of the outrage, nor weighing the probabilities of some transgression on the Frenchwoman's part, on the one hand, against a proceeding which at a glance was so suspicious on the other, the City merchant grappled with the two men, and a struggle ensued. Wresting the club from the hand of one of the intending abductors, Sir Frederick struck him to the ground, and the other at once took to his heels. Madame Angelique clung to her deliverer, but terror still stifled the power of utterance.

"Villain, what means this?" exclaimed Sir Frederick, thus sternly addressing the man whom he had stricken down, and who, half-stunned by the blow, was painfully endeavouring to rise.

But scarcely was the question put, when another person appeared upon the scene. This was Christian Ashton, who had sprung forth from the post-chaise on beholding Sir Frederick Latham leap from his horse and rush to the assistance of the ex-milliner.

The recognition of Christian on the merchant's part was instantaneous, and our young hero hastened to say to him, "Suspend your judgment, Sir Frederick. I hold myself responsible for this seeming outrage. Let me have a few words with you aside."

"Certainly, my young friend," said the merchant. "Your presence here is sufficient to induce me to suspend my opinion, as you desire."

"Madame Angelique," said Christian, now stepping up to the ex-milliner, and whispering these words rapidly but impressively in her ear, "in the name of the Lady Indora, the dead Sagoonah, and the infamous Duke of Marchmont, I command you to remain where you are. Dare to attempt flight, and I at once proclaim your numerous crimes."

The Frenchwoman remained transfixed with a sense of awful consternation, and Christian now turned to address a few words to the man whom Sir Frederick Latham had felled to the ground, but who had regained his feet.

"Hasten after your companion, and bring him back. Coward that he is, he might have known that I was at hand to shield him."

The man to whom Christian thus spoke, sped away after his comrade, and our hero then again turned toward Sir Frederick Latham. Having assured himself by a glance that Madame Angelique showed no inclination to depart, Christian said to the merchant, "Without entering into all details, Sir Frederick, I hope to be enabled in a few words to convince you of the propriety of a proceeding which you could not, in your ignorance of the facts, have regarded otherwise than as a most scandalous outrage."

Christian then gave some brief explanations, to which Sir Frederick Latham listened with profound attention.

"And it is not only Madame Angelique," said Christian, "whom we are thus anxious to secure, but likewise that villain who is in the garb of a Lascar."

"Ah! I saw by the newspapers," ejaculated the merchant, "that he is a wretch whom justice has long sought — "

"The same," interjected Christian. "He is known by the terrible appellation of the Burker. From circumstances which have come to our knowledge — But no matter, for time is now pressing."

"Should that villain be still lurking in this neighbourhood," rejoined Sir Frederick, "and should he happen to fall into my hands, — for my people are keeping a sharp lookout, — I will at once communicate with you. Rest assured that her Majesty Queen Indora may command my services in every respect, and I beseech you to convey this pledge to her Majesty."

"The two men are returning," said Christian, as he glanced in the direction whence the individuals who had seized upon Madame Angelique were now retracing their steps from the palings at the extremity of the paddock.

"Madame Angelique," said Sir Frederick Latham, turning toward the ex-milliner, and addressing her with a cold severity alike of voice and countenance, "I can no longer interfere in your behalf. Certain circumstances

have come to my knowledge which fully justify the proceeding instituted against you. You will find it more to your advantage to go quietly with this young gentleman and the men whom he has brought with him."

"Good heavens! what will become of me?" moaned the wretched Frenchwoman, clasping her hands in anguish. "Oh, pray, have mercy upon me! Let me fly to France! I vow and declare that never again will I show myself in this country —"

"Your entreaties are vain," interrupted Sir Frederick, sternly, "and you have to choose between a quiet departure with Mr. Ashton and a prompt arrest in the name of the laws which you have outraged. Which shall it be? Let your decision be quickly given."

"Oh, what do they mean to do with me?" cried the miserable Frenchwoman, who naturally pictured to herself all kinds of horrors.

"At present you can know nothing," answered Sir Frederick, "but I repeat the assurance that you have a better chance of escaping from the vengeance of the law by a docile surrender to present circumstances than by a vain and useless resistance."

"This young gentleman seems kind and good," said the ex-milliner, "and I throw myself upon his mercy. Oh, sir," she cried, addressing herself to Christian, "pray be forbearing toward a miserable defenceless female! I go with you, I go with you!"

Madame Angelique however wrung her hands in anguish as she thus spoke, and she was so overpowered by her feelings that the two men were compelled to carry rather than lead her to the post-chaise. Christian conferred for a few moments longer with Sir Frederick Latham, and they then parted, — our young hero entering the chaise, and the merchant remounting his horse, the bridle of which he had hastily attached to a gate on first catching a glimpse of the attack made upon Madame Angelique.

The post-chaise drove rapidly away, and Sir Frederick passed around to the front gate of the villa. There he rang the bell, and the parlour-maid quickly answered the summons.

"Do not be alarmed at what I am about to communicate," said the merchant, "but your mistress has been suddenly

compelled to absent herself for a time. It may perhaps be to her interest that you say as little on the subject as possible, that you devise some excuse, a sudden journey, or something of the sort, but this I must leave to your discretion. You know who I am, and let my word be a guarantee for whatsoever I am saying to you."

Sir Frederick rode off, leaving the half-dismayed, half-astonished Jane to put her own construction on the information he had imparted to her, and give way to whatsoever conjectures it might suggest.

The dusk was now completely closing in, and Sir Frederick rode onward in the direction of Balham Hill. He had not proceeded very far when on entering a lonely by-lane which he took, he beheld a man walking slowly along in front of him. On a nearer approach he perceived that this fellow had the air of a travelling tinker; his apparatus was slung to a stick over his shoulder, and his garments were grimed with black. Sir Frederick thought nothing of the circumstance, and he was passing the man at a gentle trot, when the fellow began imploring alms. He however suddenly stopped short, as if he recognized Sir Frederick, but he had said enough to enable the merchant to be struck by something in his tone. The next instant Sir Frederick, who was very far from lacking courage, sprang from his horse and threw himself upon the false tinker.

The man was however, prepared for the attack, for at the instant the merchant leaped from his steed, the ruffian let his apparatus fall behind him, and aimed a terrible blow at Sir Frederick with his club. But the merchant escaped it, and the next instant the ruffian was hurled upon the ground.

"I know you!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, with his knee upon the villain's chest and one hand grasping his throat. "You are the false Lascar, the Burker, and Heaven knows what else. Dead or alive, you shall remain in my power."

The club had been wrested from the Burker's grasp, but he struggled desperately. Indeed, ill might it have fared with Sir Frederick Latham had not a couple of labouring men suddenly appeared upon the scene, and they happened to be in the employment of the merchant himself. The Burker was secured, and conveyed to Sir Frederick's own mansion.

Intelligence of this capture was forwarded on the ensuing morning to Christian Ashton, who sent back a written answer to Sir Frederick. The Burker was kept all that day, as he had been detained the preceding night, in a cellar at Tudor House, and in the evening Christian arrived in a post-chaise to receive the prisoner. The two labourers who had rendered such timely assistance were allowed by the merchant to act as custodians of the captive during the journey to the place to which the ruffian was to be conveyed and the whole proceeding was conducted with as much secrecy as possible.

CHAPTER VIII

A VISIT TO HEADCORN

It was now a period of renewed bustle and excitement for Christian Ashton, but all the duties he had undertaken, and which either arose from his own sense of what was expedient in existing circumstances, or from the suggestion of the friends with whom he was coöperating, were most cheerfully performed. Cheerfully, yes, because it was in behalf of his generous benefactor that he was thus deeply, deeply interesting himself, — that benefactor who had given him a home, who had bidden him entertain no care for the future, and who had assured him that a fortune should be his own. All these things had Lord Clandon done for Christian Ashton, and gratitude was amongst the most eminent qualities of our youthful hero.

The reader has seen how he first became acquainted with the tragic history which so memorably attached itself to Oaklands, — how he had read the newspaper account in the library of Marchmont House in Belgrave Square, and how he had subsequently learned many minuter particulars from the old steward Purvis. He had all along believed in the guilt of Bertram Vivian, *alias* Lord Clandon; circumstantial evidence had seemed so forcibly to substantiate that guilt. But he had believed in it only so long as he was in utter ignorance of the identity of Lord Clandon with Mr. Redcliffe, and then, the instant the intelligence of this identity was conveyed to him, the speediest revulsion took place in his mind, and he became as firmly convinced of Lord Clandon's innocence. Away went all circumstantial evidence, scattered to the winds were all the facts which had hitherto combined to establish that individual's guilt, for oh, it was impossible that Christian could associate

such enormous turpitude with one whose life seemed so pure, whose heart was so generous, and whose philanthropy was so noble. And then too, Queen Indora herself had entered into certain particulars which tended to strengthen the conviction that Christian had now formed, and thus it was with no reluctance, with no fear of labouring in a worthless cause, that our young hero was at present devoting himself to such duties as the position of circumstances suggested.

In pursuance of one of these tasks, we find him taking his seat in a railway carriage at the Southeastern Terminus, a few days after the incidents we have detailed in the preceding chapters. He was bound for Headcorn, that little village in the neighbourhood of Ashford to which the unfortunate Amy Sutton had retired in order to conceal her shame from the world. In a couple of hours he reached his destination, and on proceeding to the neat little cottage where he had last seen Amy, he learned that she was still residing there. She was not however at home at the instant he called, but Mrs. Willis, the farmer's widow who kept the cottage, at once recognized Christian and invited him to enter. In the course of conversation he learned that Amy had become a mother a few weeks previously, but that the offspring of her dishonour perished at its birth. It further appeared that Amy had since been very ill, and that only a few days had elapsed since she left the couch of sickness to breathe the fresh air. She had now gone to ramble for a short distance in the adjacent fields, and her return might be soon expected. Mrs. Willis informed Christian that the unhappy young woman had suffered even more from mental anguish than from physical malady, that at times she had been seized with fits of violent excitement, while at others she had sunk into moods of the deepest despondency. All this the farmer's widow related in a spirit of benevolent compassion, and not with the whispering tongue of scandal, nor did she exhibit the slightest curiosity in respect to the motive of our hero's visit.

Amy soon afterward made her appearance, and Christian was shocked by the alteration that had taken place in her. She was not more than twenty-five, but she looked a dozen years older; her countenance was thin, haggard, and careworn. He had known her as exceedingly handsome; he

now beheld all her beauty faded, while her toilet, once so exquisitely neat, indicated, if not an actual slovenliness, at least a disregard for all personal embellishment.

The animation of joy, however, appeared upon the unfortunate young woman's features as she welcomed Christian Ashton. She entertained both respect and friendship for our young hero, and she was deeply grateful for the present visit.

"I have often and often wondered, Mr. Ashton," she said, "whether you had forgotten me altogether. It would have been natural if you had, for the unfortunate and disgraced ones of the earth are seldom borne in the memory, unless it is to be thought of with contumely and scorn, — although of these feelings I at least knew you to be incapable."

"I have frequently thought of you, Amy," answered Christian, "and it has been with pity, sorrow, and compassion. You judge me rightly; I am incapable of regarding the consequences of another's black infamy as the results of your own willing sinfulness. Yes, I have pitied you, and even if I had not this day come to converse with you on matters of business, I should not have suffered a much longer interval to elapse ere making an inquiry after your welfare."

Tears were trickling down the young woman's countenance, and with a crimson glow upon her cheeks, she said, "You have doubtless heard from Mrs. Willis — "

"I have heard all that concerns you, Amy, and I have been distressed to learn that you have suffered so severely from illness. But on your part, have you received any tidings of the important events which have recently occurred in London? "

"Yes," answered Miss Sutton, "my sister Marion has sent me letters and newspapers."

"Then you know that Lord Clandon is alive," interjected Christian, — "that he has been arrested."

"Yes, and likewise that the villain Marchmont himself is dangerously ill. Oh," exclaimed Amy, her eyes, hitherto lustreless, now flashing fire, "he must not die until I have wreaked some terrible vengeance upon him. It was but a few days ago I received from my sister a letter giving me the hope that the period for such vengeance was near at hand — "

"To deal frankly with you, Amy," interrupted Christian, "it was upon these points that I came to confer with you. You cannot have forgotten all you told me when I was last here a few months back. You gave me to understand that your sister Marion was seeking to succour you in your plan of contemplated vengeance. You informed me likewise that she had become connected with Wilson Stanhope, and I have reason to know that Wilson Stanhope himself had some dark dealings with the Duke of Marchmont. Now I must inform you, Amy, that several persons are engaged in weaving the web so tightly around Marchmont that if he should recover from this dangerous illness into which his own tortured and harrowed feelings have no doubt plunged him — "

"Good Heavens! what mean you?" exclaimed Miss Sutton, as a sudden suspicion flashed in unto her mind. "Is it possible that the safety of Marchmont himself is compromised by the arrest of his brother Lord Clandon?"

"You must not question me, Amy," replied Christian Ashton. "I am not now at liberty to explain everything I know. But this much I will tell you, that if you will abandon your own isolated and individual scheme of vengeance, and coöperate with those who, inspired by no vindictive feelings, are anxious only to expose wrong and make right come uppermost, — if, in a word, Amy, you will league with us, and throw, as it were, into the common stock all such means of prosecuting our plan as you may be enabled to afford — "

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the young woman, with a fierce enthusiasm, "anything, Mr. Ashton, so long as there be a chance of inflicting a terrible chastisement upon the head of him to whom I owe my degradation and my ruin."

"There is every chance, Amy," rejoined our hero. "Tell me, therefore, in which manner and to what extent you can assist us?"

"You know, Mr. Ashton," continued Amy Sutton, "that my frail and unfortunate sister Marion suffered herself to be handed over as the mistress of Wilson Stanhope. She knew from me that this man Stanhope had been connected with the nefarious plans of the Duke of Marchmont; she knew likewise that it was my aim to wreak a fearful vengeance,

if possible, on Marchmont's head. She resolved to succour me. For some weeks has she been living under the protection of Wilson Stanhope, toward whom she has displayed every evidence of affection; she has lavished her caresses upon him, she has insidiously assailed him with cajoleries, she has adopted every means to win his completest confidence. I need not tell you that he is dissipated, that he is addicted to wine, and that his habits are often intemperate. Thus has she succeeded in gleaning from him certain secrets of the utmost importance, but of which I myself am still unaware, for with a becoming prudence she would not entrust them to an epistolary correspondence. That these secrets, however, would be ruinous to the Duke of Marchmont if made known, I have not the slightest doubt. I was cradling myself in the hopes of a speedy vengeance when the intelligence reached me of the vile duke's serious illness, an illness which methought might end fatally. And I was striving hard to regain sufficient health and strength to repair to London to see my sister, and ascertain from her lips all that she had gleaned from Stanhope in the moments of his ebriety, or when he was under the influence of her cajoling blandishments."

"You have told me sufficient, Amy," replied Christian, who had listened with the deepest attention to the young woman's narrative, "to decide me how to act."

"But there is one stipulation which I must make," ejaculated Amy, with a sudden access of fierce excitement, "and it is that whatsoever vengeance you wreak upon the Duke of Marchmont —"

"Understand me well," interrupted Christian. "It is no vengeance which we are endeavouring to wreak; it is an attempt to expose his iniquity throughout all its various ramifications, and, as I before said, to make the right come uppermost. All his crimes shall be made to pass like a hideous phantasmagoria of spectres before his eyes, and those who have been the accomplices or the witnesses of his several deeds of turpitude shall be marshalled in dread testimony against him. On that occasion, Amy, you shall be present."

"This is what I require," ejaculated the young woman; "it is for this that I was about to stipulate. Make use of me as you will, but remember, Mr. Ashton, you pledge

yourself that I shall not be forgotten when the crowning moment of retribution arrives."

"You shall not be forgotten, Amy," rejoined our hero. "On the contrary, your presence will be needful. From inquiries which I last night caused to be instituted in Belgrave Square, there is every prospect that the Duke of Marchmont will survive this illness, though so dangerous, into which he has been plunged."

"Oh, I am rejoiced, I am rejoiced!" exclaimed Amy Sutton, and the ferocity of a tigress glistened in her eyes.

The aspect of her countenance did Christian harm to contemplate it, but he could not utter a remonstrance nor breathe a syllable of rebuke; he needed the services and the coöperation of Amy Sutton, and he was forced to avail himself of her vindictive feelings for the carrying out of his own purposes. He remained in discourse with her for some time longer, and on rising to take his leave, he addressed her in these parting words:

"Tarry you here for the present, to regain health and strength as speedily as you can, and when the moment approaches that your presence will be required elsewhere, you will receive a timely notification from me. You can let me know in a few days how your convalescence progresses, so that I may have the assurance of your ability to travel some little distance when the period for action shall arrive."

"Were I upon the bed of death," ejaculated the young woman, with another fierce glaring and flashing of the eyes, "I would not fail to obey your summons."

"Farewell," said Christian. "The interval will not be long before your wrongs, Amy, will be avenged as terribly as you yourself could possibly desire."

Our young hero then took his leave of Miss Sutton, — having previously assured himself, however, that she had no need of pecuniary assistance, — and retracing his steps to the railway station, he returned by the next train to London.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when he reached the metropolis, and he forthwith repaired to Mr. Coleman's offices in Bedford Row. The lawyer was at his place of business, and he immediately received Christian Ashton. Our young hero reported to him all that

had occurred between himself and Amy Sutton, and Coleman listened with visible satisfaction on his countenance.

"Everything progresses favourably," said the lawyer, "for the grand, the solemn, and the awful dénouement which her Majesty Queen Indora is contemplating. Travers is in our power, Madame Angelique is in our power, the villain Barnes is in our power. Amy Sutton will be forthcoming at any moment when we require her presence, and we shall now have Wilson Stanhope in our power. But there's something more still to be done."

"Let me undertake it," exclaimed Christian, enthusiastically. "You know, my dear sir, there is nothing you can ask me to perform that I will not at once enter upon."

"I know it," responded Coleman, "and with so much zeal in this good cause, it is impossible that we shall fail in eventual success. Mesh by mesh the tangled skein which his own crimes have woven is closing in around the Duke of Marchmont, and he will live, Christian, he will live to encounter the ordeal. Scarcely an hour has elapsed since I obtained tidings concerning him. The dangerous crisis is past, and though he is still raving in the delirium of fever, yet the violence of that fever is subsiding, and his physicians have but small fear as to the result. Ah, little do they suspect for what they are bringing him back to life, and fearful will be the awakening of that man from the unconsciousness which affords a temporary respite for him! But I was about to inform you — "

"This new task which I have to undertake?" exclaimed Christian eagerly.

"You know," resumed Mr. Coleman, "upon what grounds we were led to suspect that the villain Barnes had served as the instrument of the Duke of Marchmont's design against the life of Queen Indora, — that design to which Sagoonah fell a victim?"

"Yes," replied Christian. "From the inquiries made by the police, in consequence of the information given by old Mr. Carnabie, it was ascertained that the Burker in his disguise had been lurking about the queen's villa at the time the awful deed was committed."

"And as we knew," proceeded Mr. Coleman, "that the deed itself arose from the instigation of the Duke of Marchmont, there was no doubt in coming to the conclusion

that the Burker was his instrument. And such has proved to be the case, for the Burker yesterday confessed everything."

"Ah, he confessed?" exclaimed Christian. "Then circumstances are indeed favouring us."

"They are favouring us in all respects," replied Mr. Coleman. "I myself elicited everything from that villain's lips yesterday, and I returned to London last night. It appears from what he stated that a lady overheard a certain discourse between himself and the Duke of Marchmont, soon after the assassin attempt was made upon Sagoonah's life, and by the description, this lady is none other than Mrs. Oxenden."

"Mrs. Oxenden?" ejaculated Christian. "Ah! this accounts, then, for the intimacy which she formed with the duke, and which the other day came to your knowledge."

"You perceive how we have been favoured," said the lawyer, "by what the thoughtless crowd would term chance, but which the thinking man would call providence. Yes, Mrs. Oxenden has been the duke's mistress, and her testimony may be serviceable. I have caused the strictest inquiries to be made into her mode of life, and I find her to be, as you yourself represented her, one of the most profligate of women. She maintains a paramour, a young man of exquisite personal beauty, but as thoroughly depraved as herself, and with whom she is completely infatuated. My knowledge of the world teaches me that where there is such infatuation on the part of a woman, there is likewise the completest confidence, and however cautious she may be in every other respect, however strong-minded in the pursuance of her own worldly interests, she is nevertheless weak and foolish under the influence of that infatuation, and she reveals all secrets. We must therefore get Mrs. Oxenden into our power through the medium of this Alexis Oliver. It is for you, Christian, to form his acquaintance, and methinks I can arrange a plan by which you can render him a service, — a service whereby you may all the more effectually gain his confidence and secure a hold over him. But inasmuch as Mrs. Oxenden knows you and has little reason to like you, she would speak prejudicially of you to Oliver, and therefore in your dealings with him you must assume another name."

"I comprehend," observed Christian, "and I will lose no time in entering upon this new duty."

Mr. Coleman and our young hero conversed together for some little while longer, and then the latter took his departure from the office in Bedford Row.

CHAPTER IX

ALEXIS OLIVER

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of that same day, and the scene shifts to a hotel at the West End. In the coffee-room of this hotel Alexis Oliver was seated at a table, sipping his claret, and now and then partaking of the dessert spread before him.

We have already said that he was a young man of remarkable personal beauty, not above one and twenty, and possessed of features chiseled to a degree of even feminine delicacy. With a purse well filled from the ample resources of Mrs. Oxenden, Alexis was leading a life of dissipation, and enjoying himself in the manner best suited to his depraved tastes and debauched habits.

He was seated at that table, reflecting joyously upon the hopes which Mrs. Oxenden had lately been throwing out relative to her intention of making herself Duchess of Marchmont. For a few days this idea had seemed to be reduced to hopelessness by the duke's illness, which it was feared would terminate fatally, but Alexis Oliver had this afternoon been informed of the turn which had taken place in favour of Marchmont's recovery. It was therefore with additional gusto that he was now enjoying his claret, having dined alone at that West End hotel where we find him.

Several other gentlemen had been dining at the same place, but one by one they had taken their departure, and Alexis was now alone in that coffee-room. He had not, however, been left a quarter of an hour by himself when the door opened and two newcomers made their appearance. One was Captain Stanley, who, as the reader will recollect, was a young man of about four and twenty, ex-

ceedingly handsome, and, what was better still, of remarkably honourable character. His companion was our young hero, Christian Ashton.

Christian had met Stanley after he left Mr. Coleman's office, and in the course of conversation it transpired that Stanley had some slight acquaintance with Alexis Oliver. Christian told him enough to make him comprehend that it was of vital importance to Lord Clandon's ultimate interest that certain measures should be carried out in reference to Alexis, and Stanley — who was himself a firm believer in the innocence of him whom he had known as Mr. Redcliffe, and who had saved his father's life in India — readily assented to succour our hero in his present enterprise. He entertained a thorough contempt and aversion for the character of Oliver, but he had no difficulty in temporarily crushing his scruples in order to further the interests of that imprisoned and accused nobleman to whom his father was indebted for his life. He and Christian had with little difficulty succeeded in tracing Alexis to this West End hotel, which was one of the dissipated young man's favourite haunts, and the two now lounged in together, as if totally unconscious of whom they were to meet in that coffee-room.

"Ah, Captain Stanley," exclaimed Oliver, starting up from his seat, "I am delighted to see you! Come to dine here, I suppose? Well, you could not do better. The turtle is first-rate, the venison excellent. As for the iced punch, commend me to it."

Captain Stanley shook Mr. Oliver's hand with far more cordiality — or at least the appearance thereof — than he had ever before displayed, and presenting Christian, he said, "Allow me to introduce my friend Mr. Craven."

The introduction was accordingly effected, and then Captain Stanley said, "Had we known of the excellencies of the turtle and vension at this house, we would assuredly have proved them. But we have dined, and it was at a place where they gave us dreadful bad wine, so we determined upon coming hither to take just one bottle of claret."

"By all means join me," exclaimed Alexis Oliver, who was charmed with Captain Stanley's urbanity of manner. "I shall be delighted, Mr. Craven, to make your better acquaintance."

Our young hero bowed in acknowledgment of this compliment, he and Stanley sat down at the same table with Alexis Oliver, and more claret was called for.

After a little conversation on the light, floating topics of the day, Christian rose from his seat, ostensibly to glance at an evening paper which lay upon an adjacent table, but in reality to afford Captain Stanley an opportunity of whispering a few words, according to previous understanding, in the ear of Alexis Oliver.

"Who is this young Craven?" inquired Alexis, in a subdued tone, when Christian had left his seat in the manner just described. "He is quite a youth, at least two years younger than I am, but exceedingly handsome, — what the ladies would call a perfect specimen of masculine beauty."

"He is a desperate wild young fellow," replied Stanley, "with plenty of money, for his guardians make him a splendid allowance until he comes of age. He gambles and drinks, and, in short, my dear Oliver, he is twenty times wilder than you yourself are."

"The deuce!" ejaculated Alexis, "he must indeed be a precious young blade. So you have taken him in tow, Stanley, and are showing him, I suppose, a little of London life? But how the devil is this? I thought you were the very pattern of steadiness."

"To tell you the truth, my dear Oliver," responded Stanley, with a significant smile, "I am heartily sick and tired of what the world calls a steady life, and perhaps, too, the stillest water sometimes runs the deepest. You see, my governor is rather strict and severe, and therefore what with partially being under terrorism, and what with having hitherto felt no inclination to be particularly wild, I have got the reputation of being altogether steady."

"And now you mean to break out at last?" exclaimed Oliver, laughing merrily. "Well, this is capital, and I like you ten thousand times better than ever I did before. Indeed, I do not know that I ever liked you at all until the present occasion."

"Oh, if you only like wild people," responded Captain Stanley, smiling, "you will henceforth like me well enough, I can tell you. I mean to break out thoroughly and completely. In fact, I have begun. This young Craven and I are now constantly together — "

"You must let me be one of the party," interrupted Alexis. "The truth is, I want to get into a new set. All my old acquaintances have fallen off, somehow or another, or disappeared, I scarcely know by what means. One is in the Bench, another has gone abroad with his regiment, a third has died, a fourth has married, a fifth has taken holy orders, and what the devil has become of the rest I can't tell. Ruined and turned billiard-markers, perhaps."

"Why, you really speak, Oliver," exclaimed Stanley, laughing, "like a man of sixty who had outlived all his acquaintances, and yet you are not more than one and twenty."

"Something of that sort," replied Alexis; and then he added, with a half-affected, half-dissipated yawn, "When one knocks about town for two or three years, you know, one does begin to feel cursed old. But I say, Mr. Craven, — or plain Craven I shall call you, for it is decreed that you and I are to get uncommonly intimate together, — we have filled our glasses three or four times while you have been poring over that stupid paper."

"I was only looking at the Sporting Intelligence," observed Christian, with a smile. "The fact is, I have a bet or two — "

"Which is your favourite?" ejaculated Alexis, eagerly.

"Seringapatam," suggested Captain Stanley, thus with readiness coming to our young hero's assistance, for he felt perfectly well assured that Christian knew no more of sporting matters than of what was taking place in the moon.

"I don't mind giving you large odds against Seringapatam," exclaimed Alexis Oliver; and from a small pocket cut slantwise on the outside of the left breast of his surtout coat he drew forth his betting-book. "What shall we say, — a cool hundred to eighty?"

"Oh, by all means!" ejaculated Christian; and then drawing forth his own pocketbook, he proceeded to make a memorandum with as much artistic nonchalance as that displayed by Alexis himself.

"I am really glad I have fallen in with you two fellows," proceeded Oliver; "we will have rare games together. And to begin, let us have another bottle of claret."

The wine was ordered, and when the first glasses had been discussed and approved of, Alexis Oliver, who was now more

than half-intoxicated, began to discourse in that mysterious strain of semi-confidence which forms one of the phases of ebriety.

"The fact is," he said, "I am in luck's way at present. I don't like to boast, you know, but there's the finest woman in all London — you understand me? — she is over head and ears in love with me, and I of course cajole her in a most exemplary fashion. I shouldn't let every one know what game is up, but as we have agreed to be stanch allies for the future, we mustn't have any secrets from each other. Have either of you heard of a certain Mrs. Oxenden?"

"Mrs. Oxenden?" said Captain Stanley, slowly repeating the name, as if in a sort of dubiousness whether he had before heard it mentioned or not. "Why, what did I hear? Surely that is the splendid woman whom Marchmont has had in keeping?"

"Well, you are right," rejoined Alexis. "And she is a splendid woman, too, I can tell you, — full of passion, and devoted to me. There's no vanity on my part, but it is a fact that she can't endure the duke, — he's laid up now, poor fellow! — but as for your humble servant, she'd go through fire and water for him."

"No doubt of it," said Stanley. "But there is no compliment in telling you, Oliver, that you're just the young fellow to captivate the female heart."

"Well," observed Alexis, complacently caressing his beardless chin, "I may have made a few conquests in my time, but I won't say that I have, for fear you should charge me with vanity."

"Not I indeed," exclaimed Stanley. "Every young man can tell a few tales if he likes."

"No doubt of it," cried Christian, sipping his claret. "And as a matter of course amongst friends — "

"There should be no reserve," ejaculated Oliver. "That's just what I say. It is astonishing how we three fellows pull together. I see that we shall get on swimmingly."

"And so this Mrs. Oxenden," interjected Stanley, "is so infatuated with you? What a lucky dog you are! But I tell you what my idea of a woman's love is. If she gives you all her confidence, then she really loves you, but if she keeps any secrets from you, then she doesn't in reality care a fig for you."

"Now, there again we agree," exclaimed Alexis. "Between ourselves, I saw plainly enough that Mrs. Oxenden had some secret from me, and it was concerning the duke, too. Well, thought I to myself, 'I am resolved to worm it out of her.' So I plied her with all sorts of cajoleries; I poured forth a volley of such vows and protestations. I made her drink champagne, too, of which, by the bye, she is particularly fond, and so by degrees — "

"You're the cleverest fellow I ever met in my life," exclaimed Captain Stanley, affecting to be in raptures with Alexis.

"I must give you credit for most excellent generalship," said Christian, throwing in the additional weight of his own flattery. "So it ended by this Mrs. What's-her-name — Oxenden — telling you everything, eh? "

"By Jove, I got it all out of her! " cried Alexis, with a chuckle. "But you mustn't push me any further. It's all very fine, you know, for friends to have mutual confidences, but that secret, you understand, is not mine to reveal. It's like a sacred deposit — "

"Oh, of course," ejaculated Stanley, "keep your own counsel in that respect. Neither Craven nor myself would wish you to do anything that is unhandsome."

"Not for the world," cried Christian. "But we don't drink."

"Ah, the poor duke! " said Oliver shaking his head with a mysterious significancy. "If he only knew everytinng! By Jove, I could tell a secret if I liked! But I won't. No, no, it would be too bad."

"I tell you what," said Stanley, "you shall both of you dine with me to-morrow. Let it be at the Clarendon Hotel at six o'clock."

"You shall both dine with me the day after," added Christian. "We will go to Blackwall."

"Now, these are arrangements that I like," said Alexis; "they prove that we are getting all right and comfortable with each other. The day afterward you shall dine with me at this very hotel, and I'll show you whether I exaggerated just now about the turtle and venison. But what are we going to do for to-night? "

"Drink another bottle of claret," exclaimed Christian, looking at his watch, "and then away whithersoever you choose."

Scarcely were the words spoken when the waiter entered the coffee-room, and said to Alexis Oliver, "If you please, sir, a person wishes to speak to you on very particular business."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the young gentleman, somewhat sobered by an announcement which evidently struck him as something ominous. "I don't like these persons who just want to speak to you. Waiter, what sort of a looking man is he?"

"Well, sir," replied the functionary thus appealed to, "he looks something like a sporting character, — cutaway coat with brass buttons, sir, red whiskers, sir — "

"Oh, you had better see him," exclaimed Stanley. "I dare say it is some fellow connected with the turf, and who has heard that you are making up a book."

"Ah, very likely!" ejaculated Alexis, clutching at the hope. "Let him come in, waiter."

"Come in? Yes, sir," said the waiter, and he shuffled away with that peculiar coffee-room walk which it would seem every accomplished waiter must necessarily possess; but the man had upon his countenance a certain sly expression which failed not to attract the notice of Captain Stanley and Christian.

"The truth is," said Alexis Oliver, when the waiter had retired, "I have got four or five cursed little things hanging over my head. Mrs. Oxenden has given me the money two or three times to pay them, but it has always burned a hole in my pocket, as the boys say at school. So it rather frightens one when a suspicious message is delivered."

The door of the coffee-room was now thrown open, and the visitor walked in. The door swung back on its hinges, but the waiter just placed it ajar, that he might listen outside to the proceedings, the nature of which he more than half-suspected, and perhaps chiefly so from the fact that when the person in the cutaway coat had entered the hotel, another individual in a more seedy garb remained lurking against a lamp-post opposite.

The individual in the cutaway coat advanced with a polite bow toward the table at which the three young gentlemen were seated, and Alexis Oliver's looks showed that he was by no means reassured by the appearance of his visitor.

"You, sir, are Mr. Oliver?" said this person, at once

singling out the gentleman whose name he had mentioned, "and my name is Solomons. You know my errand. Sorry to disturb a gentleman at his wine, but Coleman the lawyer was peremptory in his instructions, and Mabley his client won't wait another hour. So you see, sir, it's no fault of mine, but I tried to do the business in as delicate a way as possible."

"What does all this mean?" exclaimed Christian, starting up from his seat with a well-assumed air of indignation.

"Nothing that concerns you, sir," observed Mr. Solomons, with an air of exceeding politeness. "It's just a trifle of a hundred and ninety odd pound that regards Mr. Oliver."

"By Jove, this is unfortunate!" cried Alexis. "I wish I hadn't been fool enough to go to Tattersall's to-day and buy the chestnut at Sir William Katchflatt's recommendation. Mrs. Oxenden, too, isn't at home."

"What is it you require?" exclaimed Christian. "A couple of hundred pounds to settle this debt? I have the bank-notes about me —"

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," interrupted the bailiff, "but Mr. Oliver must come along to my house, while we search the office to see if there's anything else out against him."

"And if so, I dare say we can settle it," exclaimed Christian.

"Ah, that's what I call true friendship!" cried Alexis. "Bravo, my boy, I sha'n't forget this in a hurry. I suppose I must go to the lockup —"

"Let us settle the bill here," ejaculated Stanley, "and we will all go together in a cab. There's nothing like seeing one's friend through his difficulties. Just step outside, Mr. Solomons; we will join you in a few minutes. I suppose you can trust us, and you'll have a couple of guineas for your civility."

Christian made a sign for the officer to comply, and Mr. Solomons, who had especial instructions from Mr. Coleman, hesitated not to do whatsoever our hero directed. He therefore withdrew; the waiter was summoned, the bill was paid, and the three gentlemen issued from the hotel. A cab was speedily procured; they took their seats inside. Mr. Solomons rode upon the box, and his man was left to tramp back to Chancery Lane on foot. During the drive thither, Alexis

Oliver vowed eternal friendship to Christian, who played his part so well that it seemed as if he was only doing the most natural thing in the world in undertaking to pay the debts of his new acquaintance. But all the time Mrs. Oxenden's paramour was thus expressing his gratitude, he thought within himself that of the green and inexperienced young gentlemen he had ever encountered, his new friend Craven was assuredly the greenest and the most inexperienced.

The sponging-house was reached; the three gentlemen were shown to a room, more wine was ordered, and a considerable fee was exacted for the process of searching the sheriff's office at that time of night, for it was now past ten o'clock. Nearly an hour elapsed, Alexis volunteering three or four songs, and appearing most supremely to enjoy the situation in which he was placed, — as well indeed he might, considering that his debts were to be paid from the purse of another.

At the expiration of the hour Mr. Solomons reappeared, with the intimation that there were other judgment-writs out against Mr. Oliver, and that the entire sum requisite for his emancipation amounted to four hundred and thirty pounds. Christian's pocketbook was produced, and bank-notes for that sum were counted down by him on the table with as much apparent indifference as if they were so many pieces of waste paper. Mr. Solomons received his fees in addition to the amount specified; another cab was summoned, and the three gentlemen took their departure, laughing and joking in the gayest possible humour.

" Now we will go and have supper somewhere and make a night of it," exclaimed Alexis, as the cab drove westward until more specific orders should be issued to the driver himself.

" Come to my lodgings," said Stanley, " and I can promise you something choice and good for supper."

" With all my heart," exclaimed Christian, before Alexis could interpose, for this young gentleman would have infinitely preferred Evans's or the Cider Cellars.

The order was given to the cabman, and to Captain Stanley's lodgings in Albemarle Street did the vehicle proceed. The table was soon spread with oysters, cold fowls, a French raised pie, and some other luxuries of the kind sold by Fortnum and Mason in Piccadilly. Wine and spirits were also

set forth by the captain's valet, and Mr. Oliver exhibited his intention to enjoy himself to the utmost of his power.

Half an hour afterward Captain Stanley, affecting to be entirely overcome by liquor, reeled off to his bedroom, Oliver and Christian Ashton thus being purposely left alone together. There was no need for our young hero to mention the name of Mrs. Oxenden in order to revive the topic. Alexis himself speedily returned to a subject which he was particularly prone to harp upon when in his cups, and within the next half-hour he had revealed to Christian the whole particulars of the secret which he himself had elicited from his mistress. The source of the hold which she had obtained upon the Duke of Marchmont was thus completely fathomed by our hero, but it cost him an infinite amount of dissimulation, as well as the necessity to drink an inordinate quantity of liquor in order to keep Alexis company, so that he might thus worm the details out of him.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when Christian and the valet conveyed Mr. Oliver to a cab and sent him home to his own lodgings. Our hero then sought Captain Stanley, who had not retired to rest, but was awaiting in his chamber the issue of the *tête-à-tête*, and infinite was his joy when he learned how completely Christian had succeeded in his object. Infinite likewise was the gratitude of our hero for the succour which had been so ably lent him by his friend Stanley, and which had in a few hours brought to a conclusion an undertaking that otherwise might have lasted several days.

It was about ten o'clock on the following morning — or rather, we might say, on the same morning — that Mrs. Oxenden had just finished her breakfast, when a servant entered the elegant parlour in which she was seated and presented her a note. She read it; the colour went and came in rapid transitions upon her cheeks, she looked frightened and enraged by turns. She hesitated what instructions to give the servant, who was waiting near the door, and at length she said, " You may show the gentleman up."

The domestic obeyed the order, and the visitor was ushered into Mrs. Oxenden's presence. She had risen from her seat, and without either resuming it or requesting him to take a chair, she said, with an effort to assume a dignified and haughty composure, " You, sir, are the writer of this letter? "

"My name is Coleman, madam," replied the visitor, "and that name appears as the signature to the note. You surely can recollect that you have seen me before; you once called at my office on some affair relative to your husband — "

"And you tell me, sir, in this note," interrupted Mrs. Oxenden, "that you require an immediate interview with me, that you bid me beware how I refuse it, that things have come to your knowledge which place me more in your power than I may probably suspect."

"All this is true, madam," rejoined the solicitor, calmly, "and I repeat the same in your presence."

"What — what do you mean?" faltered Mrs. Oxenden, becoming more and more frightened, as well as proportionably less able to conceal her terror, for she knew that Mr. Coleman was the solicitor engaged in the defence of Lord Clandon, and she liked as little as could be to find herself mixed up in any of the affairs which might more or less ominously regard the Duke of Marchmont.

"It has come to my knowledge, madam," resumed Mr. Coleman, "that you are acquainted with a very serious offence committed by his Grace of Marchmont, and that you have not given such information as might tend to place him within the grasp of the law. To have the knowledge of a crime committed by another, and to remain silent on the subject, is to render oneself an accessory after the fact, which in itself, madam, is a heinous offence, and the penalty of which in the present instance is transportation."

The colour now completely fled from Mrs. Oxenden's cheeks, and vain were all her efforts to appear calm and collected. She flung an appealing look upon the solicitor, and faltered forth, "What would you, then, with me?"

"I require you, madam," replied Mr. Coleman, "to accompany me to a place at some little distance from London, and there you will have to give your testimony."

"A court of justice?" exclaimed Mrs. Oxenden, with terror and dismay depicted upon her countenance. "But I shall be branding myself — "

She suddenly stopped short, and Mr. Coleman, fixing his gaze significantly upon her, said, in a solemn tone, "Yes, it is a court of justice at which your presence is required, but it is not a court constituted according to the prevailing laws of this country; it is a court formed under the influence

of circumstances as peculiar as they are terrible. It is a secret tribunal, if you will, an inquisition, but still a court where the claims of justice will be paramount, where wrong shall be exposed and right shall be rendered triumphant. Now, madam, it is to this solemn tribunal that I adjure your presence, and if you refuse to accompany me, you must take the consequences."

Mrs. Oxenden experienced a deep and unknown terror at the language which flowed from the lawyer's lips, and though in the midst of the nineteenth century, dwelling in a city which is the centre of modern civilization, in a room where she had but to stretch forth a hand to make the bell summon domestic servants to her assistance, or where she need but throw up the window and invoke the aid of the first passing constable to protect her against coercion, yet did she feel as if she had been suddenly carried back through the vista of past centuries into the gloomy profound of those middle ages when the public laws were set at nought and individuals were cited by irresistible summons to appear in the presence of the dread secret tribunals. No wonder, therefore, that solemn awe and vague, numbing terror seized upon this woman whose conscience was so far from pure, and no wonder that she, with her all natural strength of mind, should tremble and feel dismayed in the presence of that solicitor who appeared conscious of the power which he wielded over her!

"But for me, sir, for me," she faltered forth, "is there any peril to be risked? is there any punishment to be incurred?"

"Not if you obey me with readiness," replied Mr. Coleman.

"And the tribunal," said Mrs. Oxenden, — "whom is it to try?" But though she put the question, she more than half-suspected what the answer might be, if it were given at all.

"It is not for you to question me thus," responded Mr. Coleman. "Suffice it for you to know that the Duke of Marchmont was guilty of a heinous crime in instigating a miscreant to take the life of an Eastern lady of exalted rank; but, as you are aware, the assassin blow was dealt at the bosom of another. Of that crime, madam, you have had a horrible consciousness; it is this that has given you your

power over the Duke of Marchmont, it is this that has enabled you to plunge into all possible extravagances at his expense, and you have hushed the scruples of your conscience on account of the gold which he has lavished upon you. Now, madam, you may judge to what extent I might be enabled to compromise you by any revelations made from my lips; you can no longer remain insensible of my power to compel you to follow my directions in all things, or else, madam, to give you into the hands of justice as an accessory after the fact in the crime which the Duke of Marchmont instigated against the Eastern lady."

"But tell me, sir, tell me, I entreat," exclaimed Mrs. Oxenden, "how acquired you the knowledge of all these things?"

"Providence, madam," answered the lawyer, solemnly, "often suffers the web of crime to be woven throughout long years, and to be shrouded in the deepest mystery. But in the end that same Providence, by its own certain though inscrutable workings, causes the circumstances of the crimes themselves to become the source and the means of their own betrayal; and thus it is in the present instance. Now, madam, I have said enough — I have even said more than I had intended when first entering into your presence, and it is for you to decide which course you will adopt. I leave not this house without you. I have ordered a post-chaise to be here at eleven o'clock. It now wants a quarter to that hour," continued Mr. Coleman, consulting his watch, "and in one capacity or another will you presently take your seat in that chaise. It will either be as a prisoner, in the charge of a constable, to repair to Bow Street, or it will be as a witness to appear at that tribunal of which I have spoken."

"Then I will go with you in the latter capacity," replied Mrs. Oxenden.

"Good, madam," rejoined Mr. Coleman. "Make your preparations; I await you here."

Mrs. Oxenden left the room and repaired to her bedchamber, to which she summoned her maid that a few necessaries might be packed up for the contemplated journey. Though sufficiently ill at ease in her own mind, she nevertheless now assumed a certain outward calmness of demeanour, and she told her domestic that the visitor was a legal gentleman who had called relative to some property which had been

left her, and that she was compelled to proceed with him for a little distance into the country. Having given this explanation, she entered her boudoir to arrange her toilet for travelling, and almost immediately afterward Alexis Oliver made his appearance by means of a private staircase.

Pale, languid, and suffering from the previous night's debauch, the young gentleman by his aspect betrayed the dissipation in which he had indulged. Mrs. Oxenden at once perceived it, and she said, petulantly, "In spite of your promises, Alexis, you have relapsed into those ways that make you look horrible, instead of beautiful, as you ought to be."

"Now, do not be angry, my dear creature," he exclaimed, at once plying her with cajoleries. "I fell in with some friends, and you know that a man is compelled to do as others do."

"I am going away for a day or two, Alexis, — indeed, I know not exactly for how long," said Mrs. Oxenden, "and therefore I cannot find it in my heart to scold you."

"Going away?" he ejaculated. "And may not I accompany you? It is doubtless on some party of pleasure."

"Of pleasure indeed!" cried Mrs. Oxenden, with a sickly smile. "I fear that it will be very different. But I know not how it is; you have won all my confidence, I have kept no secrets from you, and I will tell you what has just occurred."

She then described the object of the lawyer's visit, and recapitulated the greater portion of what he had said to her. It happened, however, that she did not mention him by name. A look of dismay gradually expanded over the beautiful but pale and dissipated countenance of Alexis; his reminiscences, which were previously all confused, began to settle themselves and to acquire lucidity. He retrospected over the proceedings of the previous night, and now he remembered how the young gentleman whom he only knew as Mr. Craven had wormed out of him all the secrets he had learned from the lips of Mrs. Oxenden. He was shocked and frightened at his folly; he fancied that he himself was the author of all that was now occurring to Mrs. Oxenden, and the trouble of his mind was betrayed in his looks.

"Good heavens, Alexis!" she ejaculated, as a suspicion flashed across her brain, "is it possible that in your tipsy

moments you can have betrayed me? Yes, yes, I see that it is so! But at least tell me, Alexis, to whom you have so incautiously spoken, for I will not accuse you of having acted wilfully."

"Fool, idiot that I have been!" cried the young man, dashing his open palm violently against his forehead. "I would not for worlds have done this! It was last night, — Heaven only knows how I could have been so mad — "

"But who — who?" demanded Mrs. Oxenden, quickly, "who were the people that you were with?"

"A Captain Stanley and a Mr. Craven."

"I know neither of them," said Mrs. Oxenden, deliberating over the names which she had thus heard.

"Captain Stanley," continued Alexis, "is about four and twenty, very good looking, he wears a moustache, his manners are elegant. As for Craven, he is a tall, slender, elegant young man, with a profusion of dark glossy hair, large dark eyes, about nineteen I should think. Ah, by the bye, I recollect! Captain Stanley once called him by his Christian name, and that name itself is Christian."

"Christian?" almost shrieked forth Mrs. Oxenden. "Tall, slender, elegant, you say, about nineteen? With a beautiful set of teeth, and lips like those of a woman?"

"The same!" cried Alexis. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, it must be he! His name is not Craven, it is Ashton, Christian Ashton, and he is a bitter enemy of mine."

"Heavens! what have I done?" exclaimed Alexis, now more frightened than ever. "Oh, I see it all!"

"And this Mr. Coleman, the lawyer who has come to me — "

"Coleman?" echoed Alexis, with a start. "Why it is he who caused me to be arrested last night! And this Craven, or Ashton, or whatever his name is, paid the whole money with an appearance of the most off-hand generosity."

"Wretched boy!" cried Mrs. Oxenden, "what is all this that I hear? You have suffered yourself to be made a dupe, in order that those designing fiends might extract from your lips whatsoever it suited them to learn."

"Forgive me," said Alexis, entreatingly. "You tell me that no harm will happen to yourself if you obey Mr. Coleman in all things. Is it not so?"

" That is the assurance he gave me," replied Mrs. Oxenden, " but placed as I am in circumstances so dreadful, how do I know whom to believe? "

Here there was a knock at the outer door of the elegant dressing-room, and the voice of the lady's-maid was heard, saying, " If you please, ma'am, the post-chaise is arrived, and Mr. Coleman is waiting."

" You must go, Alexis," exclaimed Mrs. Oxenden: " I have but a few minutes left for my toilet." Then as she embraced him, she said, " I forgive you for whatsoever mischief you have occasioned. Do not distress yourself about it. Let us hope that things will end well, and that I shall soon return. But for Heaven's sake be cautious in future. You know that I love you, my dear Alexis, and for my sake, oh, for my sake, be prudent."

He vowed and protested that he would follow her advice; she placed a sum of money in his hands, and he departed by the secret staircase.

Ten minutes afterward the post-chaise, containing Mr. Coleman and Mrs. Oxenden, drove away from the front door of the house.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTIAN AND ALEXIS

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, and Christian Ashton was alighting from a cab at the door of Mrs. Macaulay's house in Mortimer Street. He had just returned from Newgate, whither he had been to pay his usual visit to Lord Clandon. Scarcely had he dismissed the cab, when he beheld a person hastening toward him, and he at once recognized Alexis Oliver. The countenance of the young man expressed the most fiery indignation, and Christian immediately suspected that this evidence of rage was connected with the proceedings of the previous night. He therefore assumed a calmly dignified demeanour, and thus awaited the explosion of Alexis Oliver's fury.

"Mr. Ashton," exclaimed Mrs. Oxenden's paramour, "you are a villain!"

"Perhaps it would be better, sir," replied our hero, "that we should avoid a disturbance in the open street. Be so kind as to follow me up-stairs; we shall be alone together, and to whatsoever you may say I shall doubtless be prepared to give an answer."

Alexis accordingly accompanied Christian up to the sitting-room; the latter closed the door, and then said, "I see, Mr. Oliver, that you know who I am, but I beg you to understand that I have no reason to regret or to be ashamed of my proceedings of last night. Where there are high and important duties to be performed, the most honourable character will condescend to a little dissimulation, and really, after all, it does not strike me that you have much to complain of."

"If, Mr. Ashton," rejoined Oliver, "you would throw in my teeth the pecuniary obligation —"

"Nothing was further from my intention," exclaimed Christian. "Had you suffered me to proceed without interruption, I should have simply added that you were burning to reveal certain secrets which I therefore had no particular trouble to elicit."

"But you have made the most villainous use of them," ejaculated Alexis, "and you must give me satisfaction. Name your friend, sir, and mine shall call upon him this evening. I have been wandering about in the hope of encountering you. I thought it was useless to inquire your address of Captain Stanley, as he was evidently in your plot, but accident fortunately threw me in your way."

"If you consider yourself aggrieved, sir," answered Christian, composedly, "I am bound to meet you according to the provocation you have just given me. I name Captain Stanley as my friend."

Alexis said not another word, but bowing haughtily, he issued from the room. He had already made up his mind whose assistance he would invoke in case he should succeed in finding an opportunity to challenge Christian to a duel, and he at once bent his steps to the house of the individual whom he thus purposed to engage as his second. This was none other than the Honourable Wilson Stanhope.

Mr. Stanhope was seated at the time in company with his mistress, Marion Sutton. It was an elegantly furnished apartment, and the young woman was half-reclining upon a sofa, listening to the protestations of love which the infatuated Stanhope was pouring forth. She has already been, described as a full-grown beauty, but still quite youthful, and with all the freshness of youth blooming upon her rich, luxuriant charms. Already somewhat inclined to stoutness, yet with a perfect symmetry of form, she had an air of sensuous indolence, a voluptuous kind of laziness and languor, as she lounged upon that sofa. Although it was now nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, yet she was still clad in a morning *déshabillé*, and this being open at the bosom, revealed the exuberant contours of her bust. Her light hair showered in myriads of ringlets upon her bare neck and shoulders, which were of dazzling whiteness. Her large blue eyes seemed to swim in a soft, sensuous languor, and if an artist or a sculptor had required a model for the personification of Voluptuousness on the canvas or in the form of

statuary marble, the beautiful but frail Marion might have admirably served that object.

She herself had no love for Wilson Stanhope, but, as he was handsome, and as he possessed (at least for the present) the means of keeping her in luxury, he was as well to her as any other paramour. Besides, in thus remaining with him she had, as the reader has seen, an ulterior aim to serve, and this was on behalf of her sister.

It was shortly after four o'clock when a young page in an elegant livery entered the apartment where Wilson Stanhope and his mistress were seated, to announce that Mr. Oliver was waiting in the parlour below. Stanhope at once descended the stairs to join him, for they were well acquainted, and frequently dined and drank copiously together.

"I want your assistance, Stanhope," Alexis immediately began, "in one of those delicate affairs — "

"You mean a duel, Oliver?" exclaimed Stanhope. "With whom have you been quarrelling, and what is the cause? Surely you have not found a rival in Mrs. Oxenden's affections."

"Do not ask me for a single syllable of explanation relative to the cause," ejaculated Alexis. "Suffice it to say that I have been villainously treated by a certain Christian Ashton."

"Christian Ashton?" exclaimed Stanhope. "I know that young man well. I once fought a duel on account of his sister; she is a very beautiful girl, and as for that Christian himself — "

But Stanhope stopped short; he did not choose to betray to Oliver how Christian had fathomed and frustrated the nefarious conspiracy in which he had played so prominent a part against the peace, reputation, and happiness of the Duchess of Marchmont, nor did he feel inclined to mention how the young gentleman had dealt summary chastisement upon him on the occasion when he so grossly insulted Isabella Vincent in Hyde Park.

"Ah, you know this Ashton, then?" said Oliver. "But from the tone in which you speak, you can have no very friendly feeling — "

"Toward young Ashton? Not I indeed!" ejaculated Stanhope. "And therefore it will give me all the more pleasure to see you wing him in a duel. You are a good shot, if I recollect, and from what I know of Ashton's pur-

suits, I should scarcely think he ever fired a pistol in his life."

The two gentlemen conferred together upon the arrangements for the pending duel, and Stanhope then set off to call upon Captain Stanley.

In the meanwhile Christian himself had been to Stanley, and had informed him of the challenge he had received from Alexis Oliver. Stanley was grieved to hear that the adventures of the preceding night were to lead to such a result, but he saw no possible means of avoiding the hostile encounter. He accordingly undertook to second his young friend upon the occasion, and he was pleased to behold the calm, courageous demeanour with which our hero contemplated the prospect.

Christian paid his usual visits to Shrubbery Villa as well as to the mansion of Isabella Vincent. He had resolved to say nothing of the approaching duel, but when he took leave of his sister at the one dwelling and of his beloved Isabella at the other, he felt the chords of his heart tighten painfully, though he suffered not his countenance nor his manner to betray the feelings which were thus inwardly moving him. He returned to his lodgings in Mortimer Street, and he spent a couple of hours in writing letters, which were to be delivered only in case he should fall in the hostile encounter. One was to Lord Clandon, thanking him for all the kindness which our young hero had received at his hands, and expressing the fervid hope that the measures then in progress would have the result which every well-wisher of this nobleman so earnestly desired. Another was to Christina, and therein the affectionate brother said everything that was kind and tender to his much-loved sister. A third was to Queen Indora, thanking her Majesty for all her goodness to Christina; and the last was to Isabella Vincent, taking the fondest farewell of her to whom Christian's heart was devoted.

Our hero was careful in preventing Mrs. Macaulay from suspecting the duel that was about to take place, and in this aim he fully succeeded. He retired to rest at his usual hour, and he slept soundly, — for that young man had not a taint, much less a crime, upon his conscience. The little worldly affairs he had to settle, and which were summed up in the letters he had penned, were put in order; he was a youth of courage, and he feared not death, otherwise than

on account of the affliction into which it would plunge those who were so devotedly attached to him.

A note received from Captain Stanley before he retired for the night had conveyed to Christian's knowledge the arrangements made by that officer with the Honourable Wilson Stanhope for the hostile encounter. Christian accordingly rose at half-past five in the morning, and while performing his toilet, he moved about the room with the utmost care, so as to avoid disturbing the landlady and her servants. Having secured his letters about his person, he softly descended the stairs, and at six o'clock issued from the house, unperceived by either of its inmates. Obtaining a cab at the corner of the street, he repaired at once to Captain Stanley's lodgings. This officer was ready dressed to receive him, and breakfast was upon the table. Christian partook of some slight refreshment; his demeanour continued calm, composed, and firm, and Stanley therein recognized the evidences of a courage suitable for any emergency, but which, on the other hand, was utterly apart from recklessness or bravado.

Captain Stanley's phaeton was speedily in readiness to convey himself and his young friend to their destination. A case of pistols was placed by the captain's valet in the vehicle, and they stopped on their road to take up the surgeon who was to accompany them, for Stanley had communicated with this gentleman on the preceding evening. The equipage drove to Wimbledon Common, and almost immediately after this destination was reached Mr. Stanhope and Alexis Oliver made their appearance upon the scene.

Captain Stanley advanced toward Mr. Stanhope, and taking him aside, said, "Have you thought of what passed between us last evening?"

"I bore in mind the representations you made me, Captain Stanley," was the response, "and I spoke to Oliver, but he is determined to fight."

"They are, after all, two mere boys," observed Stanley, "and it is really a pity that this affair should go to such a length."

"Oliver is furious against your principal," said Mr. Stanhope, "and though he has not acquainted me with the circumstances, yet if I may judge by the general tenor of his conduct, the provocation he received must have been immense."

" Then it is impossible," said Captain Stanley, " to avoid an exchange of shots? "

" Impossible," rejoined Stanhope.

" But you will bear in mind," resumed Stanley, " that if I have just now spoken, as well as last evening, in pacific terms, it has been entirely without the knowledge of Mr. Ashton. I would not for the world you should conceive that it was at his instigation — "

" Your word, Captain Stanley," interrupted Stanhope, " is sufficient on the point. I might have said that the only way of settling the matter amicably is by means of the amplest apology on Mr. Ashton's part."

" And that apology," said Captain Stanley, " he would not make, even if I proffered my advice in such a sense, which, however, I should not do, for as I myself am acquainted with all the circumstances, and, indeed, was more or less implicated in them, I do not conceive that Mr. Ashton has acted improperly."

" We will now, with your permission," said Stanhope, " proceed to measure the ground and load the pistols."

These portions of the ceremony were soon accomplished, and Stanley, accosting Ashton, said to him, " My dear young friend, have you any instructions to give in addition to those with which I am already acquainted? "

" None," replied our hero, in a voice that trembled not. " If I fall, Stanley, certain letters will be found upon me, as I have already informed you; and should that result compel you to take charge of them, you will execute your mission with all possible caution and delicacy."

" Rest assured, my dear friend, that such shall be the case," and Captain Stanley's voice trembled with emotion, while with fervour he shook Christian by the hand.

In the meanwhile Wilson Stanhope had conferred with Alexis Oliver, and these preliminaries being settled, the seconds gave the weapons into the hands of the principals. Christian had at first thought of receiving his opponent's fire and of discharging his own weapon in the air, but maturer reflection had determined him to abandon this plan. He felt that it would be a complete prevention to the possible demand of Alexis Oliver for a second shot, and might therefore be deemed an act of cowardice rather than of magnanimity on his own part. But, on the other hand, our young

hero had resolved to fire wide of his mark, for he would not on any account incur the risk of taking a life nor even of maiming a fellow creature, if such results could possibly be avoided.

The two antagonists were placed according to the usual rules of what are called "affairs of honour;" the seconds stood aside, the surgeon was waiting at a still greater distance. Wilson Stanhope was to give the signal by dropping a handkerchief, and all was now in readiness for that portion of the ceremony.

The handkerchief fell, the pistols were discharged. Christian heard the whizz of his antagonist's bullet close by his ear, and he escaped unhurt. A cry burst from the lips of Alexis, the pistol fell from his hand, and the right arm which had sustained it dropped to his side. Being nothing of a shot, Christian had not noticed that while endeavouring to fire wide of the living target, a slight turn of his own body had brought his weapon within almost fatal aim of his antagonist, and thus, most unintentionally, most innocently, had he wounded that opponent. The surgeon was quickly upon the spot, and it was speedily ascertained that Christian's bullet had struck Oliver's right arm, near the elbow. Nothing could exceed our young hero's grief, but Stanley represented to him that he had really no need thus to torment himself, for that it was Oliver himself who had provoked the duel. The surgeon positively declared that no fatal result was likely to ensue, and Alexis, touched by everything Christian said, proffered him his hand, exclaiming, "Let us henceforth be friends."

The parties were now about to leave the ground, when Christian, accosting Wilson Stanhope, said to him, "It is of the highest importance that I should have a few words with you presently. Tell me where we can meet. Will you call upon me at my lodgings at noon, or shall I come to your house?"

Stanhope was surprised at this address, and he said, "Why not speak to me here, Mr. Ashton?"

"When you learn what I have to say," replied our hero, "you will thank me for arranging that we should be alone together."

"Be it, then, as you will," rejoined Stanhope. "I will call upon you at twelve punctually."

Christian mentioned his address, and we should add that before the parties finally quitted the ground, it was agreed, for the sakes of all, to keep the whole affair as quiet as possible.

Notwithstanding our hero had displayed so much firmness and courage, it would be ridiculous to assert that he was not infinitely rejoiced at his own escape from death or injury, though, on the other hand, he was greatly afflicted, as we have already said, on account of the failure of his attempt to spare his adversary. On returning to London, he took his leave of Stanley, whom he warmly thanked for his co-operation; and he proceeded to his own lodgings. Mrs. Macaulay and the servants fancied that he must have gone out at that early hour on some business connected with the case of Lord Clandon, and therefore not for an instant did they suspect that he had been risking his life in a duel. It was with a feeling of indescribable satisfaction that he destroyed the letters which he had written, and he now awaited the hour when Wilson Stanhope was to call upon him.

A little after twelve o'clock the expected visitor was announced. Stanhope detested Christian, for the reasons which are already known to the reader, but still he had a strong feeling of curiosity to learn what our hero could possibly have to say to him. This feeling therefore imparted to Stanhope's manner a certain tincture of eagerness, which prevented it from appearing sullenly constrained, as it otherwise would have been. As for Christian himself, he was cold and distant, while his countenance wore a look of resolution, which added to Stanhope's curiosity, though without awakening his fears, for he little suspected what was to follow.

Our hero bade him be seated, and also taking a chair, he said, "Mr. Stanhope, I am about to address you in a manner for which you are evidently not prepared, but there is a fixed determination in my mind, and I warn you at the very outset that you will have to bend to it."

"It would seem, Mr. Ashton," replied Stanhope, "that you wish to fight another duel with the least possible delay."

"Rest assured, sir," retorted our hero, but in a calm, dignified manner, "that you are not in a position to demand any satisfaction at my hands."

" Perhaps, sir, you will come to the point," said Stanhope, " for I hate enigmas."

" You must know, then," proceeded Christian, " that you are so completely in my power that you will presently go hence with me to a place whither I propose to conduct you, or, on the other hand, you will take your departure in the custody of an officer of justice."

Stanhope started and turned very pale, for, as the reader may suppose, his conscience was none of the purest, and there was more than one misdeed at which words so ominously vague might probably point.

" It may perhaps be sufficient," continued Christian, " to allude to a certain visit of yours to Oaklands — "

" Oh, if that's your game," ejaculated Stanhope, with a sudden feeling of relief as well as with accents of scorn, " I can afford to laugh at it, and perhaps at the same time chastise you for your impertinence in daring to deal in menacing language with me. The story is too old, Mr. Ashton. The duke is not in a condition to say a word upon the subject, the duchess does not want it revived, and your simple testimony in a court of justice would be utterly valueless. What on earth your motive can be in furbishing up an old weapon, I cannot conceive — "

" Be not so hasty, Mr. Stanhope," interrupted our hero; " you and I are alluding to two different things. I was not for a moment thinking of that visit of yours to Oaklands when, as a conspirator against the reputation and the happiness of an innocent lady, your base designs were frustrated."

" Then what do you allude to? " inquired Stanhope, now turning pale once more, for something beyond a mere suspicion of the truth naturally flashed to his mind.

" I allude to another visit, Mr. Stanhope, which you paid to Oaklands," and Christian fixed his fine dark eyes significantly upon the conscience-stricken man. " You perceive therefore, that it is a visit of a more recent date."

" Well, and what then? " demanded Stanhope, endeavouring to assume an air of bravado and defiance. " Suppose that I went down to dine and pass the night at Oaklands, is there anything very extraordinary, considering the terms of intimacy on which I have been with the duke? "

" A horrible intimacy, Mr. Stanhope," replied Christian, impressively, " the intimacy of crime."

" Crime? " he ejaculated, with another start.

" Yes, crime," repeated our hero, with a still stronger emphasis than before. " Oh, sir, were it not necessary that this interview should have taken place, I would not have willingly invited to my presence a man who could have coolly deliberated over his wine upon a deed of murder, — a man who was prepared to sell himself as a bravo for the gold proffered by a miscreant who had not the courage to undertake the deed with his own hand! "

Stanhope sat pale and ghastly, listening in terror to the scathing words which came from Christian's lips.

" You see, Mr. Stanhope," continued our hero, " that more is known of your misdeeds than you yourself had fancied, and perhaps you begin to feel that you are veritably in my power. Every detail of the incidents that occurred and of the conversation which took place on that memorable night of which I am speaking is known to me. The duke purposed to hire you as an assassin, and you were willing to be hired. But at first you haggled at the terms. Fifteen thousand pounds was the price specified; you insisted on immediate payment, the duke was equally firm in rejecting the demand. Ah, it was no wonder," exclaimed Christian, with infinite abhorrence and loathing, " that there should have been much distrust between two such men! "

Stanhope gasped with an attempt to make some reply, but he could not give utterance to it; the words wavered and died upon his ashy, quivering lips.

" At length," continued Christian, entering into all these details for the purpose of overwhelming the man whom he sought to reduce completely into his power, — " at length the compromise was effected between villainous cupidity on the one hand and sterling villainy on the other, and for one-half the sum which I have named, to be paid in advance, you agreed, Mr. Stanhope, yes, you — "

" Enough, Mr. Ashton! " exclaimed the wretched man. " What would you do with me ? What would you have me do? Speak, speak ! but spare me and be merciful! "

" You see," resumed Christian, " that when at the outset I warned you that you were in my power, I did not speak in vain. All that I have now told you can be proved, Mr. Stanhope, in a court of justice, and shall be proved, too, unless you do my bidding."

" Ah? ever since that dreadful night," said Stanhope, in a voice that was tremulous with mingled fear and horror, " I have entertained the most terrible suspicions in respect to a certain personage, — I mean the Duke of Marchmont. Tell me, is anything transpiring — "

" Ask me no questions," interrupted Christian, " but prepare at once to accompany me from this house to a place whither I shall take you. If you value your own safety, your compliance is the only means of ensuring it. Refuse, and you know the alternative."

Christian walked to the window. It was an improvised and aimless movement at the instant, but as he glanced through the panes, he beheld a police constable slowly passing on the opposite side of the street.

" Refuse, Mr. Stanhope," he exclaimed, " and the presence of that officer makes you aware of the alternative to which you will have to submit."

Stanhope mechanically started from his chair, and likewise glancing from the window, beheld the officer opposite. It naturally struck him that Christian had purposely ensured the man's attendance there, and with a ghastly countenance, he said, in a hoarse voice, —

" Spare me, I entreat you! Bid me do what you will, and I obey blindfold."

" I, at least," answered Christian, impressively, " am incapable of ordering you to accomplish a crime. Great have your misdeeds been, and if you would avoid their consequences, you will now come with me. Your absence from London may last some days; if there be any one to whom you wish to convey an intimation to this effect, write a note at once, and it shall be duly delivered."

Stanhope, availing himself of this permission, penned a few lines to Marion, and at the same time Christian sat down at the table and wrote to Marion's sister, Amy. When the two letters were sealed, he rang for one of the servants, and bade the girl take them immediately to the post.

" Now come with me," he said to Wilson Stanhope. " We will proceed by railway to the nearest point of our ultimate destination, and beware how you attempt to escape, for at the first evidence of such an intention, I will mercilessly give you into custody."

" You have nothing to apprehend on that score," replied

Stanhope, who was now reduced to the most abject state of submission.

Christian had his carpet-bag already packed for the journey. A cab was summoned, and he proceeded, in company with Wilson Stanhope, to the station of that railway by which they were to travel.

As the reader has seen, the last few days had been full of activity and bustle, excitement and business, for our young hero, but he had undertaken a task to which he had devoted all his energies, and which he was resolved should be carried out to a successful issue, so far as it depended upon himself. Others were labouring with equal zeal in the same cause, and every step that was taken proved to be in precise accordance with the grand object that was being aimed at. The greatest interests were at stake, and it was therefore no marvel that so much enterprising spirit should be displayed, so many plans devised and carried out in all their varied ramifications.

At the same time of which we are writing, the crisis had fully passed in respect to the Duke of Marchmont, and he was regaining a perfect consciousness of the circumstances which had plunged him into the fever that had menaced his existence. But, oh, he knew not — very far, indeed, was he from suspecting — those other circumstances which were taking a rapid and sure development, — a development which was effectually tending to strengthen the web that his own crimes had woven and which was closing in around himself.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRIBUNAL

The scene now changes to Oaklands. It was about ten days after the incidents detailed in the preceding chapters, and a solemn ceremony was about to take place at the grand ducal mansion in Hampshire.

It was eleven o'clock at night, and we must introduce the reader into the largest state drawing-room at Oaklands. But very different was its aspect from that which it was wont to wear, for it was now hung all around with black drapery, and instead of being flooded with lustre, it was dimly lighted, so that the gloom which prevailed was made apparent rather than relieved by that feeble glimmering. As if, however, to throw this light upward with a ghastly effect, the floor was covered with white calico, but the ceiling, as well as the walls, was spread with sable cloth. At regular intervals the black drapery along those walls was gathered in such a way that the folds had the appearance of black marble pillars, and thus the monotony of an unbroken surface was avoided. A door standing half-open showed that a strong light was burning within an inner room, and this added to the strangeness and striking awe produced by the general effect of the larger apartment. What this inner room contained, could not be described from the other one, as the door was sufficiently closed for such concealment, unless the threshold were approached.

At one extremity of that vast apartment was a dais, or platform, raised to the height of two steps, and also covered with white calico. In the centre of the dais stood a large armchair, looking like a throne, and in this was Queen Indora seated. She was arrayed in white; the luxuriant masses of her dark hair fell upon her shoulders and floated down her

back. She wore a flowing headdress, which set off that sable hair to all the advantage which such contrast could afford. A magnificent shawl was thrown, as if negligently, over one knee, and nothing could exceed the solemn grandeur which invested that throned lady. There was a paleness upon the soft and delicate duskiness of her cheeks; her look was coldly resolute, without sternness or implacability. She seemed the sovereign about to perform an act of sovereign justice.

Immediately on her right hand sat a female closely veiled, and a little farther on, upon the same side of the throne, another chair contained a gentleman who wore a black mask. On Indora's left sat, first of all, another veiled lady, then a man in somewhat coarse apparel, but whose features were completely concealed by a vizard of sable silk; and farther on was a female, somewhat stout in person, handsomely dressed, and also closely veiled. Thus, to look along that line, the queen was beheld seated in the middle, with two persons on her right hand and three upon her left.

No other human beings were in that room at the moment when, as the clock of Oaklands proclaimed the hour of eleven, we direct the attention of the reader thither. Silent, if not altogether motionless, sat those six persons, but all except the queen afforded occasional though scarcely perceptible indications of either uneasiness or else of some other feeling such as awe or suspense. Indora's large dark eyes burned with a strong, steady lustre; her red lips were slightly apart, not quivering nor moving in the least, but with their very absence of motion indicating that her thoughts were fixed and her mind intent on one special object which she had the conviction of being enabled to carry out. She did not once glance toward either of those who were seated on her right hand and on her left; she remained motionless in her throne-like seat, not with an ungraceful rigidity, but with all the natural and unstudied elegance of posture which was likewise consistent with the perfect dignity of her queenly bearing. She scarcely seemed to breathe, so statue-like was she, for there was no tumultuous heaving nor falling of the superb bosom, so rich and so well developed in its sculptural contours. Altogether, with that magnificent and beauteous lady upon her throne, with the five figures (two masked and three veiled) on her right and left, with the funeral hangings to the walls and the sable pall spread upon the ceiling, with the

white floor-carpet, giving ghastly reflection to the less than dim cathedral light that pervaded the apartment, with that powerful lustre which shone forth for a few yards from the inner room, and with the tomblike stillness which prevailed, it was a scene full well calculated to strike awe and terror into the soul of any one who might be brought into the presence of the royal Indora.

In a few minutes the sable drapery on one side of the room was agitated; it opened, and old Purvis, the steward, entered the apartment. He was dressed in deep black, with a snowy white neckcloth; his look was profoundly solemn, and it was likewise with the utmost respect that he advanced toward the throne upon which Indora was seated. Sinking upon one knee, he handed a card to the queen, saying, "May it please your Majesty, she whose name is thereon earnestly implores a few minutes' private audience."

Indora, glancing at the card, seemed for a moment to be much agitated, and then a look of boundless compassion appeared upon her handsome countenance, while her bosom heaved with a deep sigh.

"I will see her, Purvis," she answered, — "yes, I will see her."

Thus speaking, Indora descended from the throne, and followed the old steward from the apartment by means of the same door through which he had entered. It communicated with the spacious landing, and as it closed behind the queen, she said to Purvis, "You have not left them together?"

"No, your Majesty," he responded; "the duke is in the waiting-room, guarded by the Hindus, and the duchess is in this apartment." At the same time he pointed toward a door on the opposite side of the landing.

"And her Grace is alone there?" said the queen, inquiringly.

"Her Grace is alone there," rejoined the old steward. "She is profoundly afflicted, she is likewise in a state of consternation."

"Yes, she is deeply, deeply to be pitied," said Indora, with another sigh. "But it is impossible that her feelings can be regarded in the present case. Sad indeed is the destiny of this poor lady, fated as she is to feel the effects of all her husband's stupendous crimes, but the hand of justice

cannot remain palsied nor the interest of others be sacrificed on her account. All this, Purvis, you comprehend as well as I."

"Your Majesty has already condescended to explain that much to me," answered the old steward. "I too experience an immense sympathy for her Grace, but at the same time I know that her feelings and interests must now be regarded as secondary to the accomplishment of those paramount duties which I am humbly but faithfully assisting your Majesty to perform."

The queen smiled graciously upon Purvis, and she then passed on into the room where the Duchess of Marchmont was so anxiously awaiting her presence.

This was the second time that these two ladies had met, that royal lady and that ducal one, and now the latter, hastening forward, threw herself at the feet of the former. The duchess had at length become acquainted with the sovereign rank of her who on the first occasion she had only known as the Lady Indora, but it was not so much in homage to a queen that she thus knelt, as it was in the character of a suppliant to one whom she felt to be, by some mysterious and unknown means, the arbitress of her husband's destiny, and therefore of her own.

"Rise, Duchess of Marchmont," said the queen, bending down to take the hands of the prostrate Lavinia, "and receive at once from my lips the assurance of my illimitable sympathy. But at the same time let me not by those words appear to encourage a hope which cannot possibly be realized."

"Oh, then there is something very dreadful which menaces my husband," exclaimed Lavinia, starting up from her kneeling position, "and your Majesty is invested with the power to punish him! But, oh, madam, the most beautiful of all royal prerogatives is that of mercy, and whether yours be now exercised in strict accordance with the law, or only by virtue of the moral power which you wield and which my husband's misdeeds have given you, yet do I beseech that the sentiment of mercy will not be forgotten."

"Let us sit down together for a few minutes, Duchess of Marchmont," said the queen, "and we will converse." Then having handed her Grace to a seat, Indora fixed her large dark eyes earnestly upon her countenance, and asked, "Has

your ladyship the slightest suspicion of the real cause for which your husband has been brought hither?"

"My thoughts are all in confusion," replied the duchess, "and I know not what to conjecture, what to suspect. But doubtless it is that same subject which on a former occasion led me to seek an interview with your Majesty, — some deep, deep cause of offence which my husband has given you — Alas! I fear me, the death of your Hindu ayah Sagoonah — "

"The Duke of Marchmont has been very, very ill," interrupted the queen, without giving any response to the observations of the duchess, "and he has been raving in the delirium of fever. I know also that your Grace has been a faithful, a constant, and an affectionate attendant at the bedside of your husband. Tell me, therefore, did he never in those ravings give utterance to aught which might have led your Grace to suspect — Oh, how can I put this question to a wife — a wife, too, who loves her husband, notwithstanding he is so unworthy of her!"

Indora became greatly troubled, for all her most generous feelings and all her most compassionate sentiments were excited on behalf of the unfortunate lady, who, pale and careworn, full of affliction, with a heart torn by vague, wild terrors, and a soul tortured by suspense, was seated all trembling by her side.

"Oh, the ravings of my husband were sometimes terrible — terrible!" exclaimed the Duchess of Marchmont, "and yet they were so incoherent, so disjointed, that I could not comprehend them. Nevertheless, I must admit that I heard enough to carry the appalling conviction in unto my mind that his conscience was sorely burdened, for otherwise no imagination could have been so shockingly excited. And there have been moments, too," continued the duchess, now shuddering with a visible horror, "when hideous fancies have flitted through my brain — But no, no!" she ejaculated, literally shaking herself in the wildness of her harrowed thoughts, "it is impossible! it is impossible!"

"At least, my dear madam," said the queen, in her most soothing tone, "your conscience is pure, and you have nought to apprehend on your own account."

"Oh, but what happens to my husband," exclaimed Lavinia, passionately, "will redound upon me! Tell me,

oh, tell me, what means the horrible mystery of all these proceedings? No sooner is my husband recovering from his dangerous illness, scarcely is he convalescent, when two emissaries from your Majesty present themselves at the house and demand an interview with him. They insisted upon seeing him alone, but I would not leave him; I clung to him; nothing could induce me to tear myself away from him at a moment when presentiments of danger had irresistibly seized upon my brain. Then they whispered some words in his ear; those words I could not catch, nor would he tell me what they were. But their power was talismanic, and their effects upon him were awful. Crushed and overwhelmed as if the call of doom had smitten his ear, he murmured forth his readiness to obey the summons which your Majesty had sent him through those emissaries. Then was it that I learned for the first time that you were possessed of queenly rank, and I knew that if ever the diadem of mercy sat gracefully on the brow of any throned lady, it must be upon yours, and I resolved to accompany my husband. It was as a captive in the power of your emissaries that he was brought hither; it was as a criminal that I beheld him ere now separated from me. And here, in his own mansion, where none but he or I should command, do we seem to be aliens and strangers. Our very steward dictates to us; the domestics, assembled in the hall, look on in gloomy silence as we pass. Oh, madam, my mind is filled with horrible alarms! For Heaven's sake tell me, what does it all mean? "

" It is impossible that I can give your ladyship any explanations now," responded Indora.

" Oh, did you not tell me on the former occasion when we met," exclaimed the Duchess of Marchmont, " did you not tell me that for my sake would you forgive all his offences toward yourself? Did you not bid me return to my husband and assure him emphatically that it was on my account your pardon was accorded? "

" All this is true, lady," answered Indora, still with the most compassionating tone and look, " but do you not remember that at the time I gave your Grace to understand there was a reservation on behalf of another, and that though I pardoned your husband for his misdeeds toward myself, I had not the power to acquit him of whatsoever offences he had been guilty of toward that other? "

" Yes, most gracious madam," replied the duchess, anxiously, and full of suspense, " all this I remember well. But was not that other to whom your Majesty alluded at the time, was it not Sagoonah? "

" No," rejoined Indora. " That other to whom I alluded, and on behalf of whom I so emphatically expressed a reservation, that other for whom indeed I had no power to speak, but for whom, on the contrary, I was myself working, that other, lady," — and after a few moments' hesitation, Indora added, " that other was Lord Clandon."

The countenance of the duchess, already exceedingly pale, now became ghastly white, and she seemed as if she were about to faint. Horrible suspicions, frightful misgivings, had evidently smitten the unfortunate lady, even to the extent of almost overpowering, crushing, and prostrating her utterly, — those same suspicions and those misgivings to which she had already alluded as having haunted her fancy when listening to the ravings of her husband in the delirium of his fever.

Queen Indora had purposely mentioned the name of Lord Clandon in order to prepare the duchess somewhat for the terrible dénouement of all the proceedings which were now in progress, and yet it wrung the heart of the generous queen to be compelled thus to shock, harrow, and appal the soul of a lady who was already unfortunate enough, whose affliction was already so great, and who was so completely innocent in respect to every one of the misdeeds that were this night to be charged against her husband.

" I beseech you, lady," said Indora, now rising from her seat in order to put an end to the interview, " to summon all your fortitude to your aid, and to take refuge in the resignation taught by the sublime truths of that Christianity in which I believe as well as your Grace. Whatsoever is now progressing must be accomplished, as if it were the irresistible progress of destiny itself. It is no persecution devised against your peace, — Heaven forbid! Certain circumstances are engendered by the misdeeds of men, and, alas! it too often happens in this world that innocent beings become the victims thereof. So it may be now. What is right must be asserted, and whatsoever is wrong must be proclaimed. Again I say, Duchess of Marchmont, summon all your fortitude to your aid; and it were ungenerous, it

were cruel, it were even wicked on my part to abstain from giving you this warning. I must now leave you, but I will summon into your presence an amiable and excellent young lady who will do her best to soothe, solace, and console you."

Lavinia listened with a look of dismay, and yet with a certain expression of gratitude, to this solemnly delivered speech. It portended something dreadful in respect to her husband, and her own tremendous fears were now frightfully suggestive. She could not speak, she could not give utterance to a syllable in reply to the queen's address, but again sinking at her feet, she took Indora's hands and pressed them to her lips, as if to implore that as much mercy might be shown to her husband as circumstances would permit her Majesty to show.

Indora stifled a sob which threatened to convulse her own bosom, and pressing the hands of the duchess, she stooped down, kissed her forehead, and devoutly murmured, "May Heaven, my afflicted friend, sustain you!"

The queen then issued from the apartment where this most painful interview had taken place, and she found Purvis waiting for her on the landing.

"Send Miss Ashton to the duchess," said Indora to the old steward, "and bid her remain with her Grace until her presence shall be required elsewhere. Then having done this," added Indora, impressively, "let the proceedings of the tribunal at once commence."

Purvis bowed, and then said, "May I be so bold as to ask your Majesty whether the twins have a foreknowledge of all that is about to take place?"

"No, Purvis," answered the queen, "as little as possible has been said to them, and they are ignorant for what object they have been brought hither. But I must not remain in conversation here; the solemn proceedings of the tribunal must commence."

Having thus spoken, Indora returned into the vast apartment hung with black, while Purvis hurried off in another direction to execute her Majesty's orders in respect to Christina Ashton. On reëntering the state room which had been fitted up with so much awful solemnity, and which in some respects resembled an inquisitorial scene of remoter and darker ages, Indora resumed her seat upon the throne. Nothing now remained changed in respect to the appearance

of that apartment from what it was when we described it at the opening of the chapter. Upon the throne on the dais Queen Indora sat again, a veiled female and a masked man on her right, two veiled women and one masked man on her left. There, too, were the sable draperies on the walls, the black pall upon the ceiling, the ghastly white covering upon the floor. And still likewise was the strange mysterious light burning within that inner room the door of which stood partially open.

About five minutes had elapsed after the return of Queen Indora from her interview with the Duchess of Marchmont, and again was the sable drapery agitated on one side of the room. The door which that drapery covered had just opened, the hangings themselves parted for an instant, and the Duke of Marchmont was conducted in by the two Hindus who had brought him in their custody from London. These Hindus were officers in the household of the royal commissioners who a few weeks back had arrived from Inderabad to announce to Indora the death of her father and the intelligence that a throne awaited her.

The two Hindus were dressed in their gorgeous uniforms, the splendour of which contrasted strongly with the sombre gloom of that awful tribunal. The Duke of Marchmont was blindfolded, and his hands were held behind him by his Hindu guards. But as if nothing should be wanting to complete the solemnity of the whole scene, and to render it as strikingly terrible as possible to him whose eyes were about to be unbandaged that they might gaze upon it, the two guards themselves were masked. One of them had his sabre drawn in his hand, as an emblem that his royal mistress wielded a power which it would be vain for the captive criminal to dispute.

The Duke of Marchmont was conducted up to the front of the throne, at a distance of about half a dozen yards from which his guards made a halt. They then unfastened the kerchief which bandaged his eyes. From the description already given of the entire scene, the reader may possibly imagine the extent of the awe-inspiring terror with which it thus suddenly burst upon Marchmont's view. Utterly unconscious was he beforehand of the spectacle that his gaze was thus to encounter, and when we consider what this spectacle was, and likewise bear in mind that the Duke of March-

mont's conscience was stained with countless crimes, it will require but little effort of the imagination for the reader to conceive the effect produced upon him. Having only within the last few days risen from a bed of sickness, still suffering physically, and incessantly tortured by all the wild apprehensions which had originally thrown him on the couch of fever, the Duke of Marchmont was but the shadow of his former self. So emaciated was his form that his garments appeared to hang upon him as if they had been made for another person; his countenance was thin, wan, and ghastly; his eyes were sunken in their sockets, the bluish tint of which enhanced the horrible aspect of their cavernous depths. Were it not that he was prepared for something dreadful, he could not possibly have sustained the shock which the appearance of the tribunal produced upon him as the bandage fell from his eyes.

He staggered, and would have fallen were it not that his guards sustained him. He beheld Queen Indora seated upon that throne, and it seemed to his appalled fancy that hers was now a terrible beauty, and that there was the aspect of the avenging Nemesis in her majestic looks. He glanced to her right, he glanced to her left; who were those veiled and masked figures? His gaze wandered elsewhere; what meant that light streaming forth from the inner room? What mysteries or what horrors were concealed by that open door? He glanced upon his guards; they were now masked, although he had previously seen their countenances when they had appeared at his mansion in Belgrave Square to summon him in Queen Indora's name to Oaklands. Oh, well indeed had all her Majesty's arrangements been combined to produce the most awful effects on the Duke of Marchmont's guilty soul!

It often happens that when a man who has for some time foreseen the wreck of fame, fortune, rank, and safety, is suddenly brought face to face with the tremendous convulsion itself, the courage of utter desperation seizes upon him. And thus was it with the Duke of Marchmont. All in a moment the most powerful revulsion of feelings took place within him, and he clutched at the wild hope that he might yet save himself by presenting a bold front to this tribunal in the presence of which he stood. And then, too, perhaps the thought struck him that the tribunal was only so

formed in order to terrify him into confessions and extort from him avowals without which no good case could be made out against him. Perhaps likewise he fancied that there might be an inclination in another quarter to spare him as much as possible, and that his own brother was chivalrous enough to make the most fearful self-sacrifice that man could possibly make for the purpose of avoiding a terrific exposure that should startle the whole world. For if it were not so, and if these conjectures were not fraught with reasons for hope, why should all those proceedings be arrayed in mystery and darkness against him? Why should not everything have been left to the regular course of human justice and to the development of legitimate process in the public tribunals?

But whatever were the thoughts, the calculations, the conjectures, or the hopes of the Duke of Marchmont, certain it is that he suddenly assumed a different bearing from that which he had at first worn. He summoned all his effrontery to his aid; desperation's self nerved him to play a neck-or-nothing game, — to listen to all that might be charged against him, to ascertain precisely in what circumstances he was placed, to envisage the perils which surrounded him, and then to act, as circumstances should direct, either with grovelling entreaty or with lofty defiance. But Queen Indora had foreseen that through this phase the mind of the Duke of Marchmont would pass, and therefore had she spared nothing in her arrangements which was calculated to sustain the most awe-inspiring effects, and to strike him, as it were, blow upon blow, each one more powerful than its predecessor.

CHAPTER XII

THE WITNESSES

THE queen, fathoming everything that was passing in the mind of the criminal who now stood in her presence, suffered several minutes to elapse before she opened the proceedings by word of mouth. At length she spoke. It was in a slow, clear, measured voice, sufficiently cold to convey an impression of the implacable sternness of justice, and yet not deviating from the feminine harmony which became her sex and her queenly station.

" Prisoner," she said, " you have been summoned by the force of circumstances before a tribunal which, though not constituted according to the laws of your country, nevertheless wields a power which you cannot possibly defy. I know full well all the hopes that you are now entertaining, but they will be defeated. Rest assured that I should not have undertaken a task in the accomplishment of which there was the slightest scintillation of doubt. Your own conscience must tell you whether you have in your lifetime perpetrated deeds that would render you amenable to any human tribunal, and if so, then are you amenable to this. Man of many crimes, the hour of retribution is come, and Providence has ordained that the tangled web which you yourself have woven by your countless iniquities should this night close in finally around you."

The Duke of Marchmont thought for a moment of making a reply, but a second reflection bade him remain faithful to the policy of hearing all that could be alleged against him, for he had by this time begun to suspect who most of the witnesses were that either veiled or masked were arrayed against him upon the platform.

" Your crimes, prisoner," continued Queen Indora, " are

now about to experience a terrible revival in your memory, even if that memory could ever have lost sight of them while conscience fed the eternal lamp which sheds its light in the desecrated sanctuary of your soul. As a train of spectres passes through the diseased imagination, so shall your iniquities, as well as their accomplices, their agents, or their victims, be presented in vivid reality to your view. First let me speak of that amiable and excellent wife of yours, the loving and affectionate Lavinia, whom by the basest of conspiracies you sought to brand with a charge as infamous as it was false, and to sully her purity in order that you might obtain a ground for her repudiation. This, which was the lightest of your misdeeds, would for any other man be crushing and overwhelming. And next I will speak to you of your black turpitude toward a young woman whose character was her only fortune, and against whom, by aid of opiate drugs, you perpetrated the foulest and most infamous outrage. Behold, she is here,— she who is alike a witness ready to testify of your black designs against your wife, and of your dark, satanic villainy against herself!"

Thus speaking, Indora pointed toward the veiled female who sat upon her right hand; the veil was thrown off, and the countenance of Amy Sutton was revealed. Looks of malignant hatred and fiendlike revenge were those which this injured young woman bent upon the Duke of Marchmont, and he recoiled in horror therefrom, — not so much because the looks themselves touched a remorseful chord in his conscience, as because it struck him that the victim of his lust was there to gloat over his final undoing and utter fall.

"And now I would address you as a man," continued Queen Indora, "who endeavoured to suborn others to the execution of your villainous purposes, — as one who lavished gold by thousands to induce a needy spendthrift to wield the bravo's dagger against my own life. Here is a deed which, if proclaimed to the world, would bring you before a tribunal constituted on a basis different from this one. There sits the man who can testify how he was thus suborned, and who on a previous occasion had lent his aid in your diabolical machinations against your own wife."

While giving utterance to this last sentence, Queen Indora's extended arm pointed toward the masked individual who

sat next to Amy Sutton, on the right hand of the throne, and when that individual took off his mask, he revealed the countenance of Wilson Stanhope. His countenance expressed a species of terror as if the man himself entertained but a vague idea of how all these proceedings would terminate, and was therefore by no means assured that exposure to the whole world would not ensue and that condign punishment would not overtake himself.

" And now I will speak to you," continued Queen Indora, " of a darker crime than even those to which I have alluded, — a crime which, when designed by you, was not altogether frustrated by circumstances, but which was so far carried into effect that it struck a fellow creature, though not the one whom it was meant to strike, namely, myself. Prisoner, it was at your instigation that the assassin blow was dealt in the garden of my villa residence, and here is a witness who can testify to the discourse which subsequently took place between yourself and the agent of your iniquity."

Thus speaking, Queen Indora made a sign for the female on her left hand to remove the veil which covered her countenance, and when this was done, the duke beheld Mrs. Oxenden. He was not altogether without a suspicion that she indeed was the veiled female who sat in that place, but when the suspicion was turned into certainty, he felt a horrible tightening at the heart, for it seemed to him as if even those whom his gold had maintained in luxury were arraying themselves against him. This idea is always a harrowing one for the individual who feels that the ground is slipping away beneath his feet, because it is frightfully ominous of the crowning catastrophe. Thus the presence of Mrs. Oxenden there, his own pensioned mistress, was indeed another blow that struck upon the heart of the Duke of Marchmont more severely than the two preceding ones dealt through the medium of Amy Sutton and Wilson Stanhope.

" But if that testimony be not sufficient," continued Queen Indora, after a pause of more than a minute, " there is one here present who can give ampler evidence. That man has confessed everything, and if it be needful, the world may know how you, prisoner, suborned him to deal the assassin blow which, though intended for myself, nevertheless smote the bosom of the unfortunate Sagoonah. He can tell likewise how you visited him in his dungeon-cell, when he was a

captive in the hands of justice, and how you furnished him the means of effecting his escape."

The Burker, who was seated next to Mrs. Oxenden, gave a sort of low, subdued growl as he removed the mask and revealed his hideous countenance to the duke. The nobleman had already recognized him, but had scarcely fancied that he could have told so much, and therefore it was indeed another and severer blow which thus struck the guilty Marchmont.

"And now," continued Queen Indora, "for the last of these witnesses who in this place" — and she emphasized the word "this" — "may be specified as one who can bear fearful evidence against you. In more than one instance has she been the agent and accomplice of your iniquities. It was by her insidious representations that my unfortunate dependent Sagoonah, who is now no more, was led to meditate murder in respect to myself. Yes, prisoner, you see that your crimes in all their details and phases are well known to me. That woman, the only one who now remains veiled, has borne testimony against you, as the rest have already borne it. But she has spoken of things relating to which these others who are present have not been enabled to speak. Do you remember that one evening you by appointment met this man" — and the queen pointed toward the Burker — "in a lane near a certain villa on Brixton Hill? Do you remember likewise that angry words took place between yourself and that man, that he demanded more of you than you chose to give, that you drew forth your purse to bestow upon him a portion of its contents, but that he, being resolved to possess himself of the whole, felled you from your horse? You see that he at least has maintained no reserve in respect to anything that concerns you. Nor has that woman. Do you recollect, prisoner, I will proceed to ask, that you were borne to the villa unto which I have already alluded, and that for some while you remained there insensible? Yes, you recollect all this. But you have yet to learn, prisoner, that in the first moments of your reviving consciousness you suffered words to escape your lips, or, rather, they involuntarily flowed from the very fountains of your troubled conscience; and those words, prisoner, were heard by Madame Angelique, who was in attendance upon you. Fearful indeed were those words, and to a fearful crime

they pointed. If you doubt me, ask that witness herself. She will tell the truth."

Thus speaking, Queen Indora made a sign for the woman whom she indicated to throw back her veil, but the guilty Duke of Marchmont had already more than suspected who she was, and therefore he was not surprised when he beheld the countenance of Madame Angelique. But if he were not surprised, he was nevertheless stricken another blow, and this was far the severest of all, for Queen Indora's language had pointed toward that other crime which was the most terrible of the many that blackened his conscience, as it was the one likewise concerning which he had hoped that there would be the greatest difficulty in putting forward any substantial proof. He now appeared to be utterly unmanned; the bold hardihood that he had assumed forsook him, every remnant of the air of defiance adopted at the outset vanished away, and he was on the very point of sinking on his knees and imploring mercy.

But again did a thought strike him, again did the very desperation of his circumstances nerve him with a preternatural courage. Therefore quick as lightning was the bold effrontery assumed again, and the air of defiance was adopted. It was still neck-or-nothing with this man who felt that he stood upon a mine, for the explosion of which there were a thousand chances against only one that he might possibly escape.

"Queen Indora," he said, now breaking silence for the first time, and endeavouring to throw a tincture of scorn into his accents, "you have marshalled against me an array of witnesses which constitute a goodly company to sit by the side of your Majesty. Commencing on the right hand, there is a notorious debauchee, an unprincipled profligate, whose relations have long cast him off, and whom society has repudiated, a man who, even according to his own account, has ever been willing to sell himself for gold. You are rich, Queen Indora, the wealth of the wealthiest portion of the Indies is at your disposal, and perhaps, therefore, you have well paid that man for his present services, and in proportion to the reward given him is his zeal to bear false testimony against me."

"If ever I told the truth in my life, my Lord Duke of Marchmont," exclaimed Wilson Stanhope, "it shall be told

against you now, if her Majesty command me to speak out."

"Let us hear the prisoner to the end," said Queen Indora, in the cold, firm voice of authority.

"Next to your Majesty," continued the Duke of Marchmont, "sits a female who admits that she has lost her virtue, and that she has no claim to rank amongst the modest of her sex. It is easy for one who has been a willing paramour to turn around upon him whom in the world's canting language she calls her seducer, and disappointed because I have not lavished gold upon her and established her in a palatial mansion as my acknowledged mistress, she is ready in her vindictive spirit to heap false calumnies upon my head."

"Villain that you are," exclaimed Amy Sutton, her cheeks flushing with rage and indignation, and her eyes flashing fire, "you know that I rejected your overtures with scorn and contempt, and that you triumphed over me by the basest of satanic arts. But Heaven be thanked, the day of your doom is arrived, and I am present to witness your downfall."

"Let the prisoner proceed," said Queen Indora, again speaking in the voice of coldly calm authority.

"Turning to your Majesty's left hand," continued Marchmont, "I behold seated next to you a woman who lives upon her profligacy; and think you for a moment that the word of such a wretch would have the slightest weight with a jury of my countrymen in a legitimate court of justice? Let her proclaim her antecedents, let her character be unmasked as her face has ere now been unveiled, and who would attach the remotest credence to a syllable flowing from such polluted lips?"

"It is easy to use harsh epithets, my lord," exclaimed Mrs. Oxenden, her dark eyes flashing lightning even more vivid than those which the eyes of Amy Sutton had shot forth, "but abuse is not argument, and the testimony against you would be already overwhelming were you not borne up by that very desperation which compels you to struggle unto the last."

"As for the villain who is seated next," continued the duke, his eyes now settling upon the Burker, "the gaol yawns for him, and it were an insult to any jury in this country to produce the testimony of such a man."

"If it wasn't for such men as you, my lord," growled the Burker, "there would be fewer such men as me. Your day is gone by, and it's of no use your making long speeches and abusing them as you was accustomed to use as your tools."

"As for Madame Angelique," continued the Duke of Marchmont, who affected to turn away with loathing and disgust from the fierce regards of the Burker, — "as for Madame Angelique, her character befits her to take her place in this company with which your Majesty has chosen to surround yourself. The whole career of that vile Frenchwoman has been one of hardened iniquity, and she has accumulated wealth by means the most degrading, the most disgusting, the most abominable. Is it such testimony as hers that can all in a moment ruin the character of a nobleman bearing one of the proudest of British titles? Place that woman in a witness-box, and any judge will indignantly command her to stand down; no jury would listen to her."

"And yet, bad as I may have been," exclaimed Madame Angelique, "I have had the honour of reckoning the Duke of Marchmont among my most intimate friends."

"I will now address myself to your Majesty," proceeded the duke, who chose to have the appearance of disdaining to bandy a word with Madame Angelique. "I have spoken unreservedly of the characters of your witnesses, and your Majesty's own good sense must tell you that I have spoken only too truly. I will not pretend to fathom the purposes which you may have in view, but whatever they may be, you must confess by this time that you have failed in carrying them out. That I have been gay, perhaps dissipated, that I have been a man of pleasure, all this it is not worth my while to deny; but, on the other hand, these things assuredly concern not yourself. That Mrs. Oxenden has been my mistress, that Amy Sutton has received me in her arms, or that my visits have been paid to the house of Madame Angelique, are facts which I might readily have admitted without the necessity of this dark parade and solemn ordeal. That my purse has been open to Mr. Stanhope, and that I have been plundered as well as personally maltreated by that villain who sits on your Majesty's left hand, are likewise facts. But that I have ever been their suborner or the instigator of their iniquities, is something

too monstrous for belief. That I, so proudly placed, should have condescended to such folly, is repugnant to your Majesty's good sense. You see, Queen Indora, that I am addressing you with the respect that is due to your sex and to your rank. But let me warn your Majesty that it is no light deed on your part to adopt all these proceedings against an Englishman, however humble his rank might be; but when you reflect what I am, what my rank is, and that I am even exempt from the jurisdiction of the ordinary tribunals of my country, and if accused of misdeeds, can be tried only by my peers, you cannot shut out from yourself the fact that you have taken a most serious step in subjecting me to an ordeal which can end in nought. Therefore I demand that your Majesty at once restores me to that freedom which these myrmidons of yours " — and he glanced toward the Hindus — " have so grossly violated."

As the reader may suppose, it cost the Duke of Marchmont no mean effort to maintain the demeanour which corresponded with the language that thus flowed from his lips, and which was so completely at variance with that inward consciousness of a thousand crimes that he experienced, but it was still by the very desperation of his circumstances that he was supported, and he was in a condition of the most awful suspense as to what might be coming next. Queen Indora listened to him with all that calm attention which a righteous judge bestows upon a captive who is accused. There was nothing, however, in her look or bearing to indicate that his words had produced any effect upon her, either to make her think less than beforehand of the amount of evidence brought to bear against him, or to feel uneasy at the responsibility of the position in which she had placed herself. The Duke of Marchmont anxiously and eagerly watched to see what the effect of his speech might be, and more deeply sank his heart within him while he noticed how coldly firm and resolutely imperturbable were Queen Indora's looks. And then, too, the door of that inner chamber still stood half-open, and the strong light was still shining forth, and there was a secret voice within the duke's guilty soul telling him that what he thus observed related to some fresh phase in the proceedings that were now in progress, but what it might be he could not possibly conjecture.

" I have heard you with attention, prisoner," said the

queen, " but it is unnecessary for me to offer the slightest comment upon your speech. Follow me."

She descended from her throne, grace and dignity in her movements, but a deep solemnity investing her as with a garment. Slowly she proceeded toward that half-open door, the Duke of Marchmont mechanically following. The Hindu guards did not now accompany him, the witnesses remained stationary in their seats upon the dais. The queen entered first into the room to which we have so often alluded, and the moment the Duke of Marchmont reached the threshold he beheld a spectacle which suddenly transfixed him with mingled awe, wonderment, and horror.

It was a much smaller room than that which had been fitted up for the tribunal, but the walls were likewise hung with black draperies. Upon a couch the corpse of Sagoonah was laid out. She seemed as if she were only sleeping, so serene was her aspect, and so completely was the freshness of the body preserved. There was in the atmosphere a perfume of drugs, which at once indicated the embalming process that had been adopted to ensure that preservation. A cap of snowy whiteness completely concealed the dead ayah's coal-black hair; her naked arms, stretched at her sides, — not stiffly, but in a lifelike manner, — had rich bracelets upon them. Very beautiful appeared that corpse, seeming as if the breath of life had only just passed out of it, and as if it had been surrendered up without a struggle, for immediately after the cold hand of death had touched Sagoonah, her features had settled down into that serenity which they now wore. Indeed, she looked not as if she were dead, but only sleeping after a severe indisposition which had spread a uniform pallor upon the natural duskiness of her complexion.

Four wax candles, as tall as those tapers which are seen on Catholic altars, shed their light upon the corpse, and produced that effulgence which streamed forth from the half-open door into the room fitted up as the tribunal. Powerful was the lustre, and solemnly grand was the effect thereof upon the body. It brought out the form of the dead Sagoonah into the strongest relief; it gave the animation of life to the skin, and it played upon her features as if they themselves were slightly moving with the presence of existence.

Amidst all the wildest conjectures which the Duke of Marchmont might have hazarded relative to the contents of this room, no possible surmise could have led him to anticipate the spectacle which he thus beheld. As we have said, therefore, he stood transfixed with mingled awe, wonderment, and horror, for it seemed as if death itself were now invoked to bear some kind of evidence against him. For upwards of a minute did Queen Indora suffer the scene to produce its fullest effect upon the prisoner, and then, in a tone of authority, she bade him advance farther into the room. He obeyed her; she closed the door, and he was now alone with that royal lady and with the corpse of Sagoonah.

"My lord," said the queen, in a voice that was low and most solemnly impressive, "you are not altogether innocent in respect to the causes which led to the premature death of the hapless Sagoonah. I will not, however, deny that her mind was already in a morbid state when you employed the vile Frenchwoman to become her temptress and instigate her to the foulest deeds. Had it not been for this conduct on your part, Sagoonah might have lived. But step by step she was led on to that fearful climax which was the accomplishment of her doom. It was retribution that she met. The means which she had adopted to take my life at the instigation of your agent became the source of her own death. The tragedy was a horrible one, and I do not hesitate to proclaim that Sagoonah was one of your victims. Oh, if you had never done aught but this, it were sufficient to fill your soul with a remorse that never in this life would be appeased. But greater still have been your crimes, and, as I ere now proclaimed, this is the hour in which they are all to be made known. Prisoner, look upon that corpse. It is the corpse of her who in the madness of feelings and passions which I shall not pause to describe gave up your own brother to the dungeon-cell which he now tenants."

"My brother!" murmured the Duke of Marchmont, staggering at the words, as if they touched a chord which vibrated most painfully to his heart's core.

"Yes, your brother!" continued Queen Indora, and now she bent the look of an avenging Nemesis upon the Duke of Marchmont. "Oh, think you that the proceedings

of this night were ended when in the adjoining room I enumerated all your minor crimes, — crimes which though great in themselves were nevertheless nothing to that which has yet to be proclaimed. And yet even that too was darkly hinted at, but not so darkly that it failed to touch your conscience. Do you not perceive that the finger of Heaven has manifested itself in all the incidents and occurrences which have been hurrying you on toward the catastrophe? By the agent of your own villainy were you stricken down, so that in the first moments of returning consciousness you might betray to that vile Frenchwoman — another agent of your iniquities — the tremendous secret which for nearly twenty years must have sat like a hideous nightmare upon your soul."

It would be impossible to describe the ghastly horror which the countenance of the guilty Marchmont displayed while Queen Indora was thus addressing him. He trembled from head to foot with a series of visible shudderings; the perspiration burst forth, cold and clammy, upon his brow; all his features were convulsed; it seemed as if he were about to fall down and writhe in fearfullest agony like a stricken serpent.

" But even without the testimony of that Frenchwoman," continued Indora, " was there a sufficiency of accumulated proofs to brand you with the full stigma of your enormous guilt. Do you doubt me? No, you cannot. Yet step by step shall you pass through this ordeal. Come with me."

The queen drew aside the sable drapery at the end of the room facing the door by which she and the duke had entered from the tribunal, and another door enabled them to emerge upon the landing. This Indora traversed, still followed by the duke, who mechanically dragged himself along, but in a state of mind that it were impossible to describe. If ever a man felt that hell might be foretasted upon earth, and that it was possible to pass through a series of worldly horrors sufficient to prepare the soul for the torments of hereafter, that man was the Duke of Marchmont. All his energies seemed now paralyzed; he was obeying the queen only as an automaton might have acted; his faculties were growing so numbed under the influence of intensest, most harrowing horror, that had she, being immortal or invulnerable, led the way into a fiery furnace, that wretched

man would perforce have unconsciously and mechanically followed her.

She opened a door on the opposite side of the landing, and she conducted him into a little room of which he seemed only to have a dim recollection, though nothing in this apartment was changed in respect to its appointments as he himself had for years known them. But, as we have already intimated, his thoughts were falling fast into confusion, not exactly with the madness of excitement, but with the stupor of an overwhelming consternation, a crushing dismay, a paralyzing horror.

In this room to which Queen Indora now conducted the Duke of Marchmont, Mr. Armytage was seated. Candles were burning upon the table. Zoe's father was excessively pale, but there was a certain air of resolution in his looks, as if he knew beforehand what duty he had to perform, and was determined to accomplish it. He rose from his seat on the appearance of Indora, to whom he bowed with the profoundest respect. He then glanced at the Duke of Marchmont, and an expression passed over his features as if he were at the moment saying to himself, " The hour of that man is come! "

Indora closed the door, and, without taking a seat, she at once said to Zoe's father, " Your name is not Armytage — it is Travers? "

" I have already admitted as much to your Majesty," replied the individual thus addressed; and his voice as well as his manner indicated the deepest respect toward that sovereign lady.

The Duke of Marchmont now appeared to rally himself slightly for a moment, and he bent upon Travers a look of the most imploring entreaty, but Zoe's father seemed not to notice it.

" You were once the valet of this person? " continued Queen Indora, glancing for an instant at the Duke of Marchmont, and " you were at Oaklands when, several long years ago, an awful tragedy took place? "

" I was so, your Majesty," responded Travers, and a moan came forth from the throat of the wretched Marchmont.

" You remember the night when the late Duke of Marchmont was murdered? " continued Indora, " and you recollect that the faithful dog, no doubt in the attempt to save

his beloved master from the assassin blow, or else to punish him who dealt it, had torn off a piece of the garment worn at the time by that assassin? "

" All this I recollect, madam," replied Travers.

" Enough! enough! " wildly ejaculated Marchmont, and his eyes glared in their cavernous sockets. " Why revive the horrors of that night? Oh, madam, who are you that you have come as an avengeress? "

" I am here to proclaim innocence and to expose guilt," was the solemn answer which the queen gave in interruption of the duke's wild speech. " Travers, reply to me, — reply to me now as truthfully as you have previously made the confession. From whose garment was that piece rent off which the faithful dog bore in its mouth? "

" It was his," responded Travers, and he pointed to Marchmont.

Hollow and dreadful was the moan which came slowly forth from the lips of the criminal; a dizziness spread itself before his vision, and he would probably have fainted had not Queen Indora suddenly laid her hand lightly upon his arm, saying, " Come with me."

She opened an inner door, and Marchmont followed her. Another room was entered. This also was unchanged as to its usual appointments, and lights were burning there. Christian and Christina Ashton rose from their seats as the queen entered. They were both very pale with suspense, for they knew that something was to happen which intimately regarded themselves, though they were utterly unconscious of what this might be. The duke did not appear to take particular notice of them; his energies were again palsied, he again felt as if he were walking in a dream.

The queen closed the door of this room into which Armytage had not followed herself and Marchmont, and without an instant's delay, she snatched up an object which lay in a recess. This object gleamed bright across the vision of the wretched nobleman, and a cry of horror burst from his lips as he recognized it. It was a dagger, — that same dagger which has before been so often mentioned in the pages of our narrative.

" Behold," exclaimed Indora, as she raised the weapon in her right arm, while her form appeared to dilate, and her countenance assumed the expression of an avenging goddess,

"AS SHE RAISED THE WEAPON"

Photogravure from original by Bird

"AS SHE RAISED THE WEAPON"
Photogravure from original by Bird

— " behold the dagger with which you took the life of your uncle! " Then pointing toward the twins with her left hand, she added, almost in the same breath, " And there behold the children of your murdered victim. In this youth you may see the rightful Duke of Marchmont! "

" O God! " moaned the wretched murderer, and, overwhelmed by fearfulest horror, he sank upon his knees, while the twins clung to each other in wildest astonishment at the words which they had just heard from the lips of Queen Indora.

CHAPTER XIII

CLOSE OF THE TRIBUNAL

THE five witnesses had remained in their seats upon the dais in the large apartment, hung with black, which had served as the tribunal. The two Hindu guards had likewise continued in that room, mute and motionless, but their presence was sufficiently indicative of the inutility of any attempt being made to escape on the part of any of those witnesses whose own consciences might have excited apprehensions respecting what was to follow. The door communicating with the room in which Sagoonah's corpse was laid out had been closed almost immediately after Indora led the prisoner thither, and thus that portion of the larger apartment was now involved in the same semi-obscurity that prevailed elsewhere. The black drapery covered that door which had recently stood half-open; solemnly awful continued to be the aspect of the tribunal.

Presently, after nearly an hour's absence, Queen Indora returned. She came back alone; the prisoner was no longer with her. Her countenance was exceedingly pale, even more so than it was ere she quitted that apartment, for her feelings had been most powerfully wrought, and if she had experienced much satisfaction in successfully carrying out all her purposes, she had likewise felt much pain at the various details of their execution. Slowly she walked, and once more she ascended the throne. She did not immediately speak; a dead silence still prevailed for a few minutes, while all the witnesses contemplated her with anxiety and suspense. At length she broke that silence.

"The solemn object for which this tribunal was constituted," she said, "has been achieved, and by the merciful assistance of Heaven I have become the instrument of ac-

complishing signal deeds this night. Know ye all who listen to me, that Bertram Vivian, now a prisoner in a felon's gaol in London, is innocent of that foul crime of murder which is charged against him, and under the imputation of which his good name has suffered for so many, many long years. It was not by his hand that his late uncle perished; the hand which dealt the assassin blow was that of him who has ever since usurped the title of Duke of Marchmont."

To Madame Angelique this fact was previously known; by Wilson Stanhope it had been for some time more than half-suspected. Mrs. Oxenden, Amy Sutton, and the Burker were likewise but little astonished to hear the announcement that was just made.

"Yes," continued Queen Indora, "innocence is made apparent and guilt is exposed, the usurper is dispossessed of the title which he had so long fraudulently borne, and his ducal coronet will henceforth be worn by him to whom it descends as a lawful heritage. I allude not to Bertram Vivian. Most of you, if not all, are acquainted with the name of Christian Ashton, and that excellent, high-minded, well-principled youth is now Duke of Marchmont."

Well as the listeners were prepared for the previous announcement, yet utterly unexpected by them was the intelligence that had just fallen upon their ears. Astonishment was depicted upon their countenances, but there was at least one amongst them who was rejoiced at the good fortune of our young hero, and this was Amy Sutton.

"It now only remains for me," continued Queen Indora, "to announce my intentions to some who are here present, and to address a few parting words to the others. For the remainder of this night you will all be reconsigned to the places which you have respectively occupied since you became the inmates of Oaklands, and to-morrow you will all individually depart hence. Let me hope that the solemn scene which you, Mr. Stanhope, have this night beheld, will have upon you a salutary effect, and that henceforth you will strive by some honourable means to earn your livelihood, instead of selling yourself as the instrument of wrong-doing and crime for patrician gold. That your hand is not stained with murder's blood must rather be attributed to accidental circumstances than to a positive absence of a most criminal readiness on your part, for on the night when

you drove your bargain with him who then bore the title of Duke of Marchmont, every syllable that passed between you was heard by Bertram Vivian, and it was his appearance at the casement behind the chair in which you were seated that produced so tremendous an effect upon that criminal. To you, however, Mr. Stanhope, I need say no more, unless it be to repeat my earnest hope that all you have this night witnessed may have its salutary influence upon you. From these things learn that though wickedness may prosper for a time, yet that in the end this prosperity is certain to turn into the bitterest adversity."

The queen paused for a few moments, while Wilson Stanhope, hanging down his head, seemed to experience all the effect which her impressive words were intended to convey.

"Amy Sutton," resumed the queen, now addressing this young woman in a kind and compassionating tone, "you have been rendered the victim of a villain, and if your soul has cherished a poignant feeling of vengeance against him it is impossible to blame you. You have now witnessed his downfall, and that feeling must be thereby appeased. In this native land of yours it is scarcely probable that you could henceforth experience happiness. In short a time I shall return to my own country, and I propose that you should follow me thither. I offer you about my own person a situation of confidence and emolument, and your welfare shall be in my charge. Your sister may accompany you if you desire it, and if you think that by removing her from the scene of those temptations which have proved fatal to her honour she will be led to repentance and to a better course of life. To my person, however, she cannot be attached, but when I reach the capital city of my own kingdom, I will place her in some position that may afford her the opportunity of eating the bread of honest industry. The frail and erring Marion was yesterday removed from the house in which she has been dwelling in dishonour, and she is now the occupant of a humbler home, where you may join her until the period for my departure to my own native clime shall arrive."

Amy Sutton threw herself at the feet of Queen Indora, whose hand she pressed in gratitude to her lips, and she thankfully accepted all the propositions which had just been made.

"To you, Mrs. Oxenden," continued the queen, "I can have but little to say, — indeed nothing more than to reiterate the hope which I have expressed to Mr. Stanhope, that the scene of this night may have a beneficial influence upon you. You will be restored to freedom; to-morrow you will go forth into the world again, and if you be wise you will endeavour by the respectability of your future career to make as much atonement as possible for your past misdeeds. The young man on whom you have been lavishing the gold which you received as the price of your own infamy has been wounded in a duel which he himself provoked, but his injury was slight, and no disagreeable consequences will ensue. On the contrary, that incident has been productive of beneficial results for Alexis Oliver. He has been made to feel the degradation of the position in which he was living with you; he is reconciled to his family, and opportunities will be afforded him of pursuing an honourable career. You must not therefore hope that the object of your infatuation will be restored to you; and now once again do I express the hope that your own conduct will experience an alteration for the better."

Mrs. Oxenden listened with a subdued sullenness to the speech which thus flowed from Queen Indora's lips, and perhaps she would have given some insolent reply if she had dared. But she was in awe of that illustrious lady who exercised the power as well as manifested the inclination to reward or to punish, though as for penitence, Mrs. Oxenden possessed not a heart that was susceptible of the influences which might lead to such contrition.

"As for you, man of many crimes," proceeded Indora, now addressing herself to the Burker, "it were an outrage against society to leave you without chastisement. If you were handed over to the grasp of your country's law your life would be forfeited, and you would expiate on the scaffold the numerous iniquities of which you have been guilty. In my estimation, however, the punishment of death is odious, and I hold the opinion that the great criminal should be treated as a ferocious beast, to be confined within bars that he may not follow the bent of his brutal bloodthirsty instincts. It is my purpose to transport you with the least possible delay to my own native country, and there you will be confined in a fortress for the remainder of your life. In

pronouncing this punishment, I must remind you that you have to congratulate yourself on escaping that doom which would be yours if you were to be subjected to the ordeal of British justice."

The Burker made no reply, but his ferocious countenance expressed the utmost satisfaction at the intelligence that he was to be dealt with in a manner that would leave him in possession of life.

"You, vile woman," proceeded Queen Indora, now addressing herself to Madame Angelique, "have committed crimes which cannot be left unpunished. If not a murderess in fact you have been so in heart, for deliberately and in cold blood did you instigate the unfortunate Sagoonah to make attempts upon my life. You have amassed a fortune by a career of infamy, and you shall not be left in the enjoyment of it. To-morrow, before you are restored to freedom, must you bequeath nine-tenths of your ill-gotten riches to the charitable institutions of the British metropolis, and on this condition only shall you be liberated. If you refuse, the law shall take cognizance of your crimes, the penalty of which will be transportation to a distant settlement."

Madame Angelique began to weep, moan, and lament, but Queen Indora remained unmoved by the vile woman's grief.

"You, Mr. Stanhope, and you, Mrs. Oxenden," resumed her Majesty, "have sufficient reasons to maintain a profound secrecy in respect to the transactions of this night. As for that man there," — thus alluding to the Burker, — "care will be taken that he shall have no opportunity of revealing in this country whatsoever he may have seen or heard within these walls. I know," continued Indora, now again fixing her eyes on Madame Angelique, "that in passing sentence upon you I have usurped an authority derived only from the law of morality, and not from the law of this country's code, but you will not dare to proclaim to the world this incident of the night's transactions. And with regard to all the rest, you will for your own sake observe a similar secrecy; for remember that though you may cease to be my prisoner, you will not cease to be amenable to the law for your past crimes."

Having thus spoken, Queen Indora descended from the throne and issued from the apartment. Immediately after-

ward Purvis, accompanied by several domestics of the household, entered that room. The two Hindu guards conducted the Burker to a subterranean place, in which he had been confined ever since he became a captive at Oaklands; the domestics led off Mrs. Oxenden, Madame Angelique, and Wilson Stanhope to the chambers which they respectively occupied; but no such surveillance was necessary in regard to Amy Sutton.

The queen, on leaving the tribunal, proceeded to that room where the usurper Duke of Marchmont had been confronted with Travers — or Armytage, as we had better continue to call him, inasmuch as he preserved his assumed denomination. On the entrance of Indora, Armytage rose from his seat, and made a profound obeisance.

"Every promise which has been held out to you," said her Majesty, "shall be faithfully kept. The wretched criminal whose gold succeeded in bribing you to silence in respect to his guilt has confessed his enormous crime. But you have now to learn that there was lawful issue from the marriage of the late duke and duchess, and that amiable brother and sister whom you have so often seen at your daughter's house are the twin offspring of that marriage."

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of Armytage on hearing this intelligence, and when the first sense of wonderment was passed, he clasped his hands, exclaiming, "Oh, how will they ever forgive me for having kept a secret the revelation of which might long ago have given them their rights."

"No," answered the queen, "that revelation would merely have proved the usurping duke's guilt and the innocence of Bertram Vivian. But not until very lately was it known that Christian and Christina Ashton were the offspring of the ducal house of Marchmont. On them, therefore, your long-maintained silence in respect to the real murderer's crime has wrought no injury. It is the pardon of Bertram Vivian which you have to ask, and that forgiveness will be accorded. The results of my plans have been such that a complete exposure of all the details of the past will be avoided, and your name need not be mentioned in a manner to make your amiable daughter blush for it. She need never know that you have for years been cognizant of the great guilt of him who has this night been led to confess everything.

And if so much care has been taken in respect to your reputation, it is not for your own sake, but it is for the sake of your amiable Zoe, whom Christina loves so well. To-morrow you will be restored to freedom, and may the rest of your life be passed in a manner to be contemplated with satisfaction. You go forth into the world again as a man freed from debt, —I may say as a rich man. Your daughter's fortune, which you had squandered, is replaced; you will not have to blush nor lament when you again meet her. It will be your own fault if you do not henceforth live in comfort and prosperity, and should you by renewed speculations reduce yourself to distress, you must not hope that a helping hand will again be stretched out to save you."

Armytage fell at the queen's feet, pouring forth his gratitude for her kindness, and vehemently protesting that his experiences of speculation had been far too bitter not to afford a lesson that he would never forget.

Indora issued from that room, and on the landing she met Mr. Coleman, the solicitor, who was just descending the staircase leading to the floor above. He held in his hand a folded document, and presenting it to the queen, he said, "Madam, I have the pleasure of placing in your hands this complete confession of the dying criminal."

Indora took the paper, and opening it, she glanced at the signature, which was tremulously written. The names of Mr. Coleman, a physician, and of Purvis, the steward, were appended as those of the witnesses. That document was the proof of Bertram Vivian's innocence. The queen's aim was now accomplished, the hope which had long inspired her was fulfilled, the object for which she had toiled was achieved. The stigma was removed from the name of him whom she had so long and so devotedly loved. She had been sustained by a wondrous courage throughout all the manifold proceedings which had been leading to this result, but now that it was accomplished a sudden reaction took place within her, the joy of success was almost more than she could endure; she staggered against the wall for support, she felt as if she were about to faint. Mr. Coleman hastened to procure a glass of water, and when the queen had partaken of the refreshing beverage, she was revived.

She entered an adjacent apartment, attended by Mr.

Coleman, and she said to him, " Is it, then, as we conjectured? Has the shock been too much? "

" It is so, your Majesty," answered the solicitor. " The physician declares that the unhappy man cannot survive many hours."

" And his wife, the unfortunate Lavinia, she who can no longer be spoken of as the Duchess of Marchmont? " and tears of compassion trickled down Indora's cheeks as she gave utterance to these words.

" The unfortunate lady of whom your Majesty speaks," rejoined Mr. Coleman, " is kneeling by the bedside of her husband. The village clergyman has just arrived, and the perishing sinner is joining with him in prayer."

" But Lavinia? " said the queen, in accents of most mournful inquiry.

" That lady who is so deeply to be pitied," responded Coleman, " seems as if she likewise had received her death-blow. She is overwhelmed with grief and horror. She looks as if she were in a dream, in a kind of half-stupor which numbs the intensity of her affliction. She can scarcely believe that all she has heard is true. Was it not a distressing scene, madam, when your Majesty broke to the unhappy lady the terrific intelligence? "

" It was a scene," answered Indora, shuddering at the bare recollection, " which I never, never can forget, — a scene which will often hereafter haunt me, for the wild shriek which rang forth from Lavinia's lips is still sounding in my ears. Oh, yes, it was a frightful scene. And yet I was in a measure prepared for it, for I had previously granted the unhappy lady an interview, before the proceedings in the tribunal commenced. And in that interview I had endeavoured to prepare Lavinia's mind as much as possible for something dreadful. But, oh, when I sought her second time, and began breaking the frightful intelligence as delicately as I could — oh, Mr. Coleman, the spectacle of anguish that I witnessed cannot possibly be described. Ah! it is terrible to reflect that in performing an act of justice, in proclaiming wrong and making right come uppermost, the consequences should redound with such appalling power upon the head of an innocent person."

The queen wiped away the tears from her eyes, and after a brief pause, Mr. Coleman inquired, " Where are that

brother and sister? Where are those whom we must now call the Duke of Marchmont and Lady Christina Vivian?"

"I left them alone together after that dreadful scene when their wretched relative fell at their feet and confessed his stupendous guilt. He was removed to the chamber upstairs, and then I said enough to my young friends to make them comprehend how it was that they belonged to the ducal house of Marchmont, and that Christian was now the bearer of the proud title. Yes, I left that young brother and sister alone together, that they might weep for joy and for grief in each other's arms, — for joy at this wondrous change in their circumstances, and for grief as they thought of their perished parents. I will now seek them, and before I retire to rest I will likewise see that unhappy lady the idea of whose grief fills my own heart with woe."

"And I, with your Majesty's permission, will at once repair to London," said Mr. Coleman, "to communicate the results of this night's proceedings to him who is so deeply interested in them."

"But not until his unhappy brother shall have breathed his last," rejoined the queen, "must you proclaim to the world how guilt has been made manifest and how innocence is vindicated."

Mr. Coleman bowed in acknowledgment of Indora's command, and he then took a respectful leave of the queen, who forthwith proceeded to the apartment where she had left Christian and Christina nearly an hour back.

CHAPTER XIV

DEATH

It were scarcely possible to convey an idea of the feelings experienced by the twins on contemplating their suddenly altered position. That Christian should be the bearer of a ducal title, that Christina should now have a patrician prefix to her name, were facts which they could scarcely comprehend. They who had believed themselves to belong to a family in the middle class of life had now been told that they bore one of the loftiest names in the British peerage. Moreover, they who not a very long while back had known the pinching need of penury, and had moistened poverty's crust with their tears, were to be now surrounded by almost boundless wealth and to be in the possession of immense means of doing good.

As yet they were unacquainted with all the minute details which so intimately concerned the mystery of their birth, but Queen Indora had told them sufficient to make them aware that they were the children of that Duke of Marchmont of whose murder they had read and heard, and at which they had shuddered, — the children of that Duchess Eliza for whose sorrows they had wept, though at the same time believing her to have been the guilty paramour of Bertram Vivian. But now they knew that their mother was innocent, that neither previous to her departure from Oaklands, nor subsequent to it, had she deviated from the path of rectitude, and that though she and Bertram had loved fondly and devotedly, yet that this love of theirs had not betrayed them into error. Christian and Christina could therefore look without shame upon the memory of their unhappy mother, but not the less painful were the tears which they shed when reflecting how much that poor mother

must have suffered ere she sank into her nameless grave in an obscure village churchyard in a distant county. And the twins wept painfully, too, as they thought of their unhappy sire, who, when wandering forth in his despair, and in the silence of night, had met his death from the hand of an assassin. These were painful retrospections truly, and mingling with the consciousness of rank and wealth and brilliant position, they taught the twins the world's invariable lesson, that there is no perfect happiness upon earth, and that however high the chalice may be filled with honey, there is to be at least one drop of gall mingled with its contents.

And now, too, Christian and Christina were enabled to regard as a relation that noble-minded man whom, as Mr. Redcliffe, they had known as a friend and a benefactor, and oh, how they rejoiced that his innocence had been made manifest! But here again was the gall mingling with the honey, for if on the one hand the startling revelations of this night had rendered them aware that they had a relative of whom they could be proud, at the same time they learned that they had another of whose crimes they could only think with blended distress and horror. Yes, bitterness was mingled with the sweetness of the twins' reflections, but still there was happiness for them, — happiness for that beautifully handsome young man who now bore a ducal title, happiness for that maiden of transcending loveliness whose name a patrician dignity graced. And at one time this young man had served in a humble capacity the very kinsman who bore that usurped title, the very kinsman who enjoyed the wealth that was now to be all Christian's own. But, ah! if there were one reason more than another for which our young hero rejoiced in the wondrous change that had taken place in his circumstances, it was that he could place the coronet of a duchess upon the brow of that charming Isabella who had loved so faithfully, so devotedly, so unselfishly.

The twins embraced each other over and over again when they were left alone together by Queen Indora; they mingled their tears as they spoke of their perished parents, and they smiled upon each other in mutual congratulations for the bounties which all in a moment seemed to be showering upon their heads. Then they exchanged solemn looks, and they shuddered simultaneously, and Christian drew his sister

closer to him, as they spoke in half-hushed and awe-inspired whispers of the wretched man whom they had ere now seen kneeling, crushed and overwhelmed, at their feet; but again they smiled as they exultingly exclaimed, " Thank Heaven, his innocence is made manifest! "

And though neither at the moment mentioned the name, yet in the sympathy and unison of their hearts did they mutually comprehend to whom the allusion pointed, — that benefactor whom they had known as Mr. Redcliffe, and whom they had subsequently learned to be Lord Clandon or Bertram Vivian, and who was now the inmate of a felon's gaol, but a gaol from which he would shortly be released. And oh, what a deep debt of gratitude did the twins feel that they owed to that high-minded, noble-hearted queen who had toiled on so laboriously, so perseveringly, and so arduously, to bring all matters to that crisis which should at the same instant afford the opportunity for proving Bertram Vivian's innocence, and for proclaiming that they themselves were scions of the ducal house of Marchmont. But, on the other hand, how immense was the compassion which Christian and Christina experienced for the unfortunate Lavinia, — that lady whom they knew to be so innocent and so amiable, and who had proved a ministering angel to the husband at whose hands she had sustained so much wrong in so many different ways!

The twins had been left alone together for nearly an hour ere Queen Indora returned to them as morning was advancing. But during that hour how much had they to think of, how much to talk of, what subjects of wonder and horror to contemplate, what contrasts to draw between the past and the present, what tears of sweetness and sadness to shed in alternate showers!

And now the queen came back to them, and Christina threw herself into the arms of that sovereign lady who had never treated her as an inferior, but always as a friend; and Christian, taking her Majesty's hand, pressed it to his lips. They sat down to converse together, and the queen communicated to them the happy intelligence that Mr. Coleman had set off to London to report the issue of all these proceedings at Oaklands to him whom they so nearly concerned; so that our hero and heroine knew that not many hours would elapse ere Bertram Vivian would be relieved

from all suspense, and would have the joyous consciousness that his innocence would be triumphantly made apparent to the whole world.

The discourse of Queen Indora and the twins was interrupted by the entrance of Purvis, the faithful old steward, who came as the bearer of a special request to him whom he now for the first time saluted as Duke of Marchmont.

"My lord," he said, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "permit an old man who liked and loved you when little dreaming who you really were to offer his felicitations on your attainment of your just rights. And in you, lady," continued Purvis, turning toward Christina, "I recognize a resemblance to your poor mother."

The steward, the queen, and the twins were all much affected, and the two latter grasped the old man by the hand.

"I come," said Purvis, after a pause, during which he to a certain extent regained his self-possession, "with a message from that dying man."

"If he wish to see me," said Christian, "I will go to him. If he be penitent, truly and sincerely penitent, I will not refuse him my forgiveness, although he took my father's life."

"And your ladyship," said the old steward, again addressing himself to Christina, "will you accompany my lord your brother, for the dying man implores the pardon of you both?"

"Yes, I will go," replied our generous-hearted heroine.

Queen Indora glanced approvingly on the twins, and they issued from the room, followed by Purvis. They ascended the staircase; they paused for a moment at the door of the chamber in which lay the dying nobleman, and in the sympathetic unison of their hearts they exchanged looks which were as much as to imply that they both felt the necessity of conquering all repugnances as much as possible, in order that they might smooth the pillow of the dying penitent.

Purvis gently opened the door, and the twins entered. By the couch knelt Lavinia, her face resting upon her hands, and by her side knelt the village clergyman. The physician was standing close by the head of the bed, with a solemn expression of countenance, for though accustomed to look upon death-scenes, yet this one was attended with circum-

stances extraordinarily calculated to strike the heart with awe. But the dying nobleman himself — oh, what pen can describe the ghastliness of his countenance, the utter misery of his looks? His hair, which had only recently begun to turn gray, had actually grown many shades whiter during the last few hours. Instead of having the appearance of a man in the prime of life, he looked as if at least sixty winters had passed over his head.

Lavinia and the clergyman, upon hearing the door gently close, quitted their kneeling postures, and tears gushed forth from the eyes of both Christian and Christina on catching the first glimpse of the countenance of her who had so long borne the title of Duchess of Marchmont. All vital tint seemed to have fled from that countenance; even the very lips were of marble paleness. Its expression was so haggard, so care-worn, so woebegone, that even if she herself had been criminal it would have excited pity; but innocent in every respect as they knew her to be, it filled their hearts with anguish to look upon the face of that afflicted lady. The clergyman, a venerable man, bowed to the twins with the profoundest respect, and contemplated them with a mournful interest, for he had known their parents, and he was indebted to their father for the incumbency which he held. The physician likewise saluted the young Duke of Marchmont and Lady Christina Vivian, but the dying nobleman covered his face with his thin wan hands, and groaned audibly.

Lavinia tried to speak, but she could not; her voice was choked with the intensity of her feelings, yet her eyes eloquently proclaimed the gratitude she experienced for this visit of pardon which they paid to her perishing husband. As for that man himself, he also tried to give utterance to some words, and he essayed likewise to raise himself up in the couch, but the power of speech seemed to have gone from his palsied throat and that of motion from his tranced limbs. Another attempt on Lavinia's part to say something to the young pair proved ineffectual, for the first sounds of the syllables that wavered on her lips died away in a spasm of intensest agony which excruciated her whole frame. She burst into tears, and seizing the hand of each of the twins, she pressed them by turns to her lips. Christina threw her arms around Lavinia's neck and wept passionately upon her

bosom, while Christian tremulously murmured, "We are here to assure your husband of forgiveness."

"Oh, this is more than I could have expected!" moaned the dying nobleman, now finding utterance for a few broken sentences. "I who have been so wicked, so deeply stained with guilt, I who deprived your father of his life, oh, Christian, Christina, it is more than I ought to have hoped! But, my God! even now that you are here, I cannot look you in the face!"

And again did the wretched man cover his countenance with his hands.

"If your penitence be sincere, as I trust and hope and believe it is," said Christian, in a soft voice, "receive the assurance of my pardon, and that of my sister."

"Can you forgive me? is it possible that you can forgive me?" asked the dying man. "Oh, what hearts do you both possess! It must be a paradise to have such hearts as yours, but mine cannot understand them. Yes, Christian, my penitence is sincere. O God! with such remorse as this, how can there be otherwise than contrition? My confession is made; you are Duke of Marchmont. I need not ask that you and your amiable sister will be kind to my poor wife —"

"Think not of me, Hugh," gasped forth the afflicted Lavinia. "I shall not long survive you. I feel it here," and with an expression of ineffable anguish on her countenance, she pressed her hand upon her heart.

"Christian, you have forgiven me," continued the dying nobleman, in a hollow voice, and at the same time his equally hollow eyes were turned toward our hero, "and such generosity on your part will experience its reward. The same with Christina. Oh, if I dared bless you — But no, no! blessings from my lips —"

"Remember," said Christian, "that a Redeemer died to save us from the consequences of our sins, and for our blessed Saviour's sake the mercy of God is illimitable."

"Oh, these are words of solace, coming from your lips!" murmured the dying man, and he made a movement as if he would take the hand of our young hero.

"It is a sign of forgiveness which from my heart I afford you," said Christian, and he at once gave his hand to the perishing penitent.

At the same moment a change came suddenly and visibly

over the countenance of the latter; its paleness grew corpse-like, the eyes appeared to sink deeper into their sockets, some words to which he could not give audible utterance wavered upon his lips. Then came a low moan, followed by a gasp, and next by a strong spasm, which seemed to thrill painfully through the penitent's form, and then all was over.

There was a profound and solemn silence for the space of several moments, but Lavinia appeared uncertain relative to the supreme fact. She gazed with a dismay, half-wild, half-awefelt, upon the countenance of her husband; then she swept her looks around upon those who stood with her by the side of the couch, and she read in their faces the truth to which she had striven to close her convictions. A piercing cry burst from her lips, and whether she fell forward or threw herself upon the corpse, was not apparent, but there she lay, motionless as he upon whose form her head rested. For several instants those who beheld the unfortunate Lavinia fancied that she was abandoning herself to a profound and absorbing woe which had supervened on that sudden access of wild despair; but as she moved not, and as not so much as even a sob or a sigh was wafted to their ears, they grew alarmed. They raised her; there was a small pool of blood on the counterpane at the spot where her mouth had rested, and the physician pronounced her to be a corpse.

Deeply, deeply affected were the twins as they suffered themselves to be led forth from that chamber of death. They rejoined the queen, to whom they communicated the details of the sad scene they had witnessed, and Indora mournfully remarked that it were better for Lavinia to have died thus than to have lived to deplore a husband who was unworthy of her lamentation. Her Majesty and the twins retired to their respective chambers to rest for a few hours, but sleep closed not the eyes of either of them.

The man who had so long borne the title of the Duke of Marchmont was now no more; he had passed beyond that sphere in which his crimes would have rendered him amenable to human laws; he had gone to that other world, in which he was to appear in the presence of a more dread tribunal. But his wife, who had been an angel on earth, had gone at the same time to be an angel in heaven, and it

was a touching reflection, made by the twins to each other, that the hapless Lavinia had taken that eternal flight at such a moment to intercede at the footstool of eternal grace for the man to whom, notwithstanding all his crimes, her heart was devoted. It was now communicated to all the domestics and to the surrounding tenantry that our young hero was Duke of Marchmont. He received their respectful homage with a becoming modesty, and he gave orders that the funeral of the deceased husband and wife should be conducted with all possible privacy. They were interred in the family vault of the village church; and thus terminated the career of a man whose life was full of misdeeds, and of a lady whose soul was spotless.

Wilson Stanhope, Mrs. Oxenden, and Armytage were released from their captivity, according to the queen's promise; and they all three had their own good reasons for maintaining a profound silence in respect to the transactions in which they had played a part at Oaklands. Madame Angelique executed a deed, which Mr. Coleman drew up, transferring the bulk of her property to certain charitable institutions in the metropolis, and she was then suffered to take her departure from Oaklands, bitterly repenting that she had ever mixed herself up in the affairs of the late owner of that mansion. The Burker was conveyed away secretly, and under circumstances of all possible precaution, by the two Hindus, and in a deep disguise, as well as under a feigned name, he was placed on board a ship bound for the East Indies. The embalmed corpse of Sagoonah was interred in the churchyard of the village of Oaklands.

We have purposely avoided entering as yet into any details calculated to clear up the mysteries attending the fate of the Duchess Eliza after her flight from Oaklands, as well as the birth of her twin children, because we shall presently have to describe the whole of the evidence which was given before a committee of privileges appointed by the House of Lords to investigate the claim of Christian to the Marchmont peerage. But before commencing those important explanations, we will lay before the reader the substance of the confession made by the deceased nobleman, in the presence of Mr. Coleman, Purvis, and the physician, and which the solicitor duly committed to paper. In doing this we shall have to make repeated references to the opening chapters of our

narrative, and it would therefore be as well if the reader would here cast a glance over those earliest portions of the story which related the loves of Bertram and Eliza.

Soon after the marriage of the Duke of Marchmont and Miss Lacey, they went abroad on a Continental tour, which lasted for several months; and they returned to Oaklands, in the autumn of the year 1829. There they were joined by Lord Clandon and Bertram Vivian. The singular behaviour of Eliza and Bertram to each other mystified Lord Clandon, who was perfectly ignorant of the loves of his brother and Eliza when they were at Oxford, as indeed the duke himself likewise was. Lord Clandon fancied that Mrs. Bailey, as a relation of the youthful duchess, might possibly be in her Grace's confidence, and therefore be enabled to throw some light on the matter which thus bewildered him. He succeeded, as the reader will recollect, in worming out of Mrs. Bailey the entire narrative of the past. Devilish ideas were thereby engendered in Lord Clandon's brain. He was steeped to the very lips in debt, and he knew perfectly well that, generous though his uncle the duke was, he would not disburse the large sum that was required to clear him of his liabilities. Besides, he constantly trembled lest his creditors should expose the state of his affairs to the duke, who, being a man imbued with the highest sense of honour in pecuniary matters, was quite capable of discarding him altogether and withdrawing his countenance from him. The duke's marriage had been deeply galling to Lord Clandon, and the youth of the duchess seemed to promise that it might not be unproductive of issue. Thus if an heir were born to the title and estates of Marchmont, farewell to the last hope of Lord Clandon, who would be doomed to remain a poor peer, with an income of scarcely a couple of thousand a year, and with debts to ten times that amount.

His lordship was therefore inspired with evil thoughts by the narrative he had received from Mrs. Bailey's lips. At that time, however, he entertained not the slightest idea of assassinating his uncle. All he aimed at was so to direct his machinations that the duke should at once divorce himself of the hope of having legitimate progeny from his marriage. It was of the highest importance for Clandon to achieve this object, for the success of the measure would leave him still heir presumptive to the title and estates of

Marchmont, and so long as he had these prospects before him, he could raise money and satisfy his creditors.

He therefore lost no time in putting his evil projects in a train of operation. He threw himself in the way of the duke, and insinuated himself into his Grace's confidence. Thoroughly versed in all the arts of hypocrisy, he affected a mild, submissive, and deferential manner while proffering his insidious advice, and at the same time he played his part so well that he seemed to be as much swayed by affection toward his brother as by a respectful esteem for the duchess and by love, gratitude, and veneration for his uncle. The duke listened to him with a thankful confidence, while Clandon affected to believe that the conduct of Eliza and Bertram toward each other arose from an excess of prudence on the part of the former, and an extreme sensitiveness on that of the latter. He proceeded to recommend that the duke should throw Bertram and Eliza more together, and that he should afford them opportunities of cultivating a friendly intimacy. The bait took; the duke followed his villainous nephew's insidious advice, and the results were as Clandon had foreseen.

He continuously watched the proceedings of Bertram and Eliza; he saw how their manner changed toward each other, and that all their love was reviving in their hearts. Then it was that he penned an anonymous letter, in a feigned hand, addressed to the duke, and the contents of which were to the effect that Bertram was dishonouring him. The duke watched the movements of his young wife and Bertram, and he beheld that embrace in which the latter passionately and impetuously folded the duchess. The reader will recollect the scene which ensued. Bertram fled to the village inn, having previously encountered his brother Lord Clandon, to whom he imparted what had occurred; and the inanimate form of the duchess was borne into the mansion. The duke ordered Mrs. Bailey's carriage to be immediately got in readiness to take the duchess away. Lord Clandon inwardly chuckled at the success which was thus attending his schemes, but he affected the utmost sympathy with his uncle, and even spoke as if he were inclined to plead for his brother. The duchess sent a letter by one of her maids to Mrs. Bailey, with a request that she would present it to the duke, for whom it was intended. Lord Clandon vol-

unteered to perform this office, and he entered the apartment in which the duke had shut himself. He dared not conceal the fact that he had been entrusted with a letter for fear it should subsequently transpire by some other means, but while appearing to study the language of conciliation, he in reality so framed his speech that it tended to aggravate and embitter his uncle more than ever, if possible, against the duchess. He thus accomplished the result at which he aimed, for the duke positively refused to open his wife's letter. However, on issuing forth from the duke's presence, Clandon assured the maid that the duke had read the letter, but that his resolve was not to be shaken. The duchess, seeing that her last hope was gone, then left the house.

In the meanwhile Bertram from the village inn had despatched a letter to the duke, and when Lord Clandon joined him at that tavern, Bertram informed him of the circumstance. The duke received the letter, the contents of which filled him with a bewildering uncertainty. After all, Eliza might be innocent! He sent for Jane, her Grace's principal lady's-maid, and from her lips he heard that the duchess had called God to witness her innocence, previous to her departure. Jane, moreover, informed the duke that her Grace's writing-desk contained certain documents to which she had made allusion in the letter sent by the hand of Lord Clandon. The duke flew to his wife's boudoir, opened the writing-desk, and read all the letters which gave him a complete insight into the loves of Bertram and Eliza at Oxford. Then a veil fell from his eyes, and he believed that his wife was innocent. He rushed forth from the boudoir, and encountered Lord Clandon, who had just come back from the village after his interview with his brother. There was then a horrible clearness in the mind of the duke, and the conviction smote him that Lord Clandon had been playing a most perfidious game. He bade Clandon follow him into the drawing-room, and there he at once accused him in a manner which made Hugh imagine that his uncle had by some means acquired a positive knowledge of his treachery. He was filled with confusion; the duke beheld his guilt depicted upon his countenance, and he abruptly quitted his nephew in a way which testified all his displeasure.

Lord Clandon was horrified on thus beholding a gulf suddenly opening at his own feet and threatening to swallow

him up. All his schemes appeared to be redounding with overwhelming violence against himself. The duke would take back his wife, and would restore his confidence to Bertram! Ruin and disgrace would remain as the portion for the guilty Clandon! Then it was that in the utter desperation of his soul the horrible thought of assassinating his uncle flashed into his brain. It speedily settled and acquired consistency there; his purpose was fixed. But in order to play a part which should eventually avert or disarm suspicion, he affected to be deeply anxious that the duchess should be found, and he offered a reward to any individual who should discover her retreat. He went out as if to search for the duchess, but it was in reality to look for his uncle. He however failed in falling in with the duke, and he returned to Oaklands. Shortly afterward his Grace reappeared, but Lord Clandon took good care not to throw himself in his uncle's way. From his valet Travers he learned that the duke had gone out again.

This was past one in the morning, and Lord Clandon pretended that he should retire to rest, bidding Travers call him early, that he might get on horseback and renew the search after the duchess. When Travers had retired, Lord Clandon stole down from his chamber, and, provided with a pistol, and with a dagger which he had taken from Bertram's room, he sallied forth from the mansion. His search on this occasion was not a long one, for he met his uncle close by the pond in the by-lane. The duke was indignant on recognizing Clandon, and he turned away from him. The next moment the fatal blow was dealt; the murderer's hand plunged the dagger deep down between his uncle's shoulders. With a savage howl the duke's dog Pluto sprang at the assassin, and Clandon instantaneously discharged his pistol. The faithful animal had caught the murderer by the skirt of his coat, and Clandon did not perceive that a piece had been torn off. The dog fell wounded, and the murderer rushed away. Regaining the mansion, he stole up to his own chamber, and tossed off his clothes, still unsuspecting, in the horrible confusion of his mind, that a fragment of his coat had remained in the dog's mouth.

Soon after six o'clock the servants of the household were again up, and on the portals being opened, the wounded Pluto dragged himself in. Lord Clandon, hearing the sounds

of many voices down-stairs, hastily rose from his bed, and dressed himself in a different suit from that which he had worn at the time of the murder, for he naturally studied every circumstance to prove that he had actually been in bed for the last few hours. On descending to the hall, he found the servants surrounding the dog, from whose mouth the piece of cloth had dropped. Travers was there at the time, but on observing that fragment of cloth, he was smitten with a suspicion, and he rushed up to his master's room. There he found the coat which Lord Clandon had thrown off, and while he was yet examining it, that nobleman himself entered the chamber. He saw that it would be impossible to conceal his guilt from his valet, and with a haggard, ghastly look, he said, " Travers, be silent, be secret, and your fortune is made! "

Travers bowed in silence, but by his own looks he showed that he understood his master's meaning, and that he might be fully relied upon. The corpse of the duke was found, and by the devilish ingenuity of Lord Clandon all circumstances were so well combined as to throw the whole weight of suspicion upon his brother Bertram.

From these explanations the reader can be at no loss to comprehend the details of the confession made by the murderer on his deathbed, and which were duly taken down by Mr. Coleman in the presence of Purvis and the physician.

CHAPTER XV

LORD CLANDON

We need hardly inform the reader that immense was the public excitement when it became reported abroad that Lord Clandon was innocent of the murder of his uncle many years back, that he who had so long borne the ducal title since that tragic event was the veritable assassin, that having in a last illness made a full confession, he had prematurely paid the debt of nature, that his unhappy wife, as innocent as he was guilty, had perished through affliction at the same time, and that a youthful heir had been found for the title of Marchmont. But it did not transpire by what means these revelations and these circumstances had been brought about. The secret of Queen Indora's arrangements in respect to the tribunal was faithfully kept by the old steward Purvis and the other domestics at Oaklands who had been necessarily privy to these measures.

The queen and the twins returned to London. Christina remained with her Majesty, but Christian, by the advice of Mr. Coleman, and likewise at the earnest recommendation of his cousin Lord Clandon, proceeded to take up his abode at Marchmont House in Belgrave Square. There, at a mansion in which he had formerly filled a comparatively humble position, he was now received as a lord and a master, and the carriages of the highest aristocracy were continuously driving up to the door that cards might be left for the young Duke of Marchmont.

The day for Lord Clandon's trial was now at hand. The law required that this ceremony should take place, though every one knew that it must prove a mere matter of form, and that the innocence of his lordship would be fully made manifest. Indeed, immediately after the events at Oaklands

Lord Clandon ceased to occupy a cell in the prison of Newgate, but was lodged in the best apartments of the governor's house, where he was treated with all possible distinction. He did not, however, avail himself of the altered circumstances of his case to demand permission to issue from the prison walls, but he was daily visited by Queen Indora, the young Duke of Marchmont, and Lady Christina Vivian.

The day of the trial arrived, and the court was crowded to excess. Indora and Christina were not there; they considered that it would not be seemly for them to make their appearance thus in public. But Christian was present, and as he sat upon the bench near the judge, he was an object of the utmost interest on the part of all the spectators. Clad in mourning, which he however wore rather for the sake of the hapless Lavinia than for that of the assassin of his own father, looking pale and slightly careworn with the effects of much excitement, the young duke maintained a demeanour in which dignity and modesty were blended; and he longed for the termination of these proceedings that he might accompany his loved relative, Lord Clandon, to the home prepared for his reception in Belgrave Square.

A profound silence for a few minutes reigned in the court when Lord Clandon was ushered into the dock, and a feeling of deep sympathy prevailed on behalf of that nobleman. He, as well as Christian, was clad in mourning, for inasmuch as his brother had died penitent, Bertram did not conceive that he ought to refuse that tribute to the memory of the deceased.

The jury having been sworn and the indictment read, there was a pause to afford an opportunity for the prosecuting counsel, if any, to rise and open the case. But there was none, and the judge observed, glancing with much kindness and sympathy toward the prisoner: "It is notorious that in this case the nobleman who stands in the dock will in a few minutes make his innocence completely manifest, and it is therefore a most unnecessary humiliation to keep him in a place which criminals only should occupy."

This hint was immediately welcomed by murmurs of approbation, and the turnkey at once requested Lord Clandon to issue from the dock and take a seat at the barristers' table. Then several noblemen and gentlemen, who had known him in his younger days, crowded around to shake

him by the hand, and several friends of a more recent date likewise pressed forward for the same purpose. Amongst these latter were Sir William Stanley, his son Captain Stanley, and Sir Frederick Latham. Mr. Coleman was likewise there, having in his possession the important document which had recently been drawn up at Oaklands, and which was now to be produced. This was the confession.

In the first place, Purvis the steward, and the physician who had attended at the murderer's death-bed, were placed in the witness-box and sworn, and they declared that they had attested the document which was now exhibited to them. Mr. Coleman went through the same ceremony, and the clerk of the court then read the confession. It was listened to with the attention and interest which such a narrative was so well calculated to excite, and when the reading was terminated, the foreman of the jury at once rose, saying, "It is with unfeigned pleasure that we formally proclaim that with which the court was already acquainted, namely, the innocence of Lord Clandon."

"Before your lordship pronounces my discharge," said Bertram, rising from the seat which he had taken at the barristers' table, "I would crave your indulgence and that of the jury while I speak a few words on my own behalf. I admit my object to be that they should go forth to the public through the ordinary channels of intelligence. I have two distinct purposes in view: in the first place, to rescue the memory of a deceased lady from even the slightest remnant of suspicion which may rest against it, and in the second place, to prove how for several long years I was in utter ignorance of my uncle's tragic end, and how for even some time after that intelligence reached me I was unable to take any steps toward the demonstration of my innocence."

Lord Clandon paused for a few moments; he was deeply affected at that allusion which he had made to the deceased Duchess Eliza. Having regained his self-possession, and amidst the breathless silence which prevailed in the court, he proceeded as follows:

"Not for an instant do I attempt to deny that I fondly and devotedly loved Eliza Lacey, with whom I first became acquainted at Oxford. We plighted our faith to each other; we were separated, and I went abroad. During my absence it was reported that I had perished, and she was prevailed

upon to accompany my uncle the Duke of Marchmont to the altar. Subsequently she learned that I was alive; but into all these details of a sad, sad history it is not my purpose to enter. Suffice it to say that I deemed her faithless, and on arriving in England, I repaired to Oaklands that I might have an opportunity of upbraiding her for the supposed perfidy. That opportunity presented itself, but, alas! I found that she was to be pitied and not blamed. Our mental agony was immense, excruciating, ineffable. But she was a wife. Had she been the wife of a stranger, her position would have rendered her not the less sacred in my eyes, but as the wife of my own uncle — oh, I was incapable of a deed of infamy!

"It was arranged that I was to depart speedily from Oaklands and set out for the Court of Florence, to which I had been appointed envoy plenipotentiary. The moment for bidding farewell drew nigh; my adieux were said to the Duchess Eliza, and yielding to the anguish of my feelings, I clasped her in my arms. The duke beheld the scene, as you have already been informed by the confession ere now read, — that confession of my guilty brother. I fled to the village tavern, and some while afterward my brother joined me, with the intelligence that the Duchess Eliza had disappeared from Oaklands. She had gone forth as a wanderer on the face of the earth, — she who was innocent! Maddened by the tidings, I sped in search of the unhappy lady. For hours I wandered, and at length I overtook her. It was then midnight, and in a lonely spot by the side of a stream was she seated, weeping bitterly. This spot was miles away from Oaklands. She reproached me not as the author of the frightful calamities which had fallen upon her head, and though she gave way to the most passionate lamentations, she mentioned not my name with upbraiding. She vowed that she would retire into some complete seclusion, where she would linger out the rest of her unhappy days, and this seclusion she was determined should be far remote from the scenes where she had suffered so much misery. My conduct was full of respect and sympathy and grief, and I did not even so much as take her hand; I felt that any demonstration of tenderness on my part would be an insult in such circumstances. I persuaded her to proceed to an adjacent village, where she might repose herself for a few

hours. She accompanied me; we walked side by side, — she did not even take my arm, though she was sinking with fatigue, and I dared not offer it.

"As we entered the village, in the middle of that momentous night, a return post-chaise was passing through. The unhappy duchess abruptly proclaimed her intention of taking it. She entered the vehicle; I sat upon the box. I was resolved that whatsoever might subsequently transpire, there should be nothing in my conduct to justify or to enhance the suspicions already pressing so fatally against her. On reaching the town to which the chaise belonged, the duchess bade me ensure her the means of rapid conveyance to one of the remotest counties of England, it mattered not which. An equipage with four horses was accordingly obtained, and I resolved to see the unfortunate lady to some place of safety before I bade her farewell for ever, for I was afraid lest in her despair she should commit suicide. Indeed," added Lord Clandon, with a voice full of emotion, "I believe she meditated self-destruction at the moment when I found her weeping so bitterly by the side of that stream."

He again paused for a few minutes, and then continued his narrative in the ensuing manner:

"The duchess travelled inside the chaise; I continued to ride outside, acting as her guardian and her friend. We travelled on and on for many long, long hours without ceasing, and frequently did I ask the duchess whether she would now stop and find a home in some neighbouring seclusion. But when she asked where we were, and the answer was first 'In Warwickshire,' then 'In Derbyshire,' then 'In Yorkshire,' she still replied, with passionate vehemence, that she would go farther still. And thus, without stopping except for a few minutes at a time, we reached Cumberland. Then the duchess said that she would halt there; and indeed, thoroughly exhausted mentally and physically as she was, it would have been impossible for her to proceed farther. At a village near the Scottish border did we thus stop at last, and the duchess besought that I would continue to conceal her name and rank, as both had been concealed throughout that long, long journey. With the least possible delay the unhappy duchess procured for herself a lodging in a cottage situated about a mile from the village, and the

mistress of which was a widow between thirty and forty years of age. I then bade adieu to the duchess. There was one clasp of the hand, there was one kiss imprinted upon her brow, and I rushed away, not daring to remain another minute."

Again did Lord Clandon pause, and so full of pathos had been his voice as he told this affecting tale, that there was scarcely an unmoistened eye in the court.

"Yes, I fled precipitately," he at length resumed, "anguish and remorse in my heart, for I felt that I had been the cause of this wrecked happiness and ruined reputation which had overtaken one so innocent, so young, so beautiful. I sped to the nearest seaport on the eastern coast; I embarked on board the first ship which I found ready to bear me away from a country that I resolved never to revisit. I pictured to myself a terrific exposure at Oaklands, the direst accusations fulminating against my character, my reputation gone, my prospects blighted, and the name of Bertram Vivian handed over to universal execration as that of the seducer of his own uncle's wife. It was a Dutch ship in which I embarked, and I arrived at Rotterdam. At the very moment of entering the port, a large ship was clearing out for the Indian Seas. Unhesitatingly I took my passage on board of her, and favoured by prosperous winds, the voyage was made in an exceedingly short space of time to Java. Thence I repaired to Calcutta, with the determination of offering my services to the Anglo-Indian government, for the funds which I had in my possession when leaving England were now nearly exhausted. I had assumed the name of Clement Redcliffe, and I should add that my arrival at Calcutta had outstripped all British intelligence of events passing at the time I left my own native country, so that I still continued in the completest ignorance of the horrible tragedy which had occurred at Oaklands.

"I must here observe that it happened, when I was engaged in a diplomatic capacity at Washington, prior to that fatal visit of mine to England which had led me to Oaklands, I had obtained certain intelligence in respect to the policy of the United States Government toward Japan and China. I learned on my arrival at Calcutta that there were flying rumours of this contemplated policy, but no one seemed to understand the precise bearings thereof. I waited upon

the governor-general, and gave him such explanations that not only astonished him, but likewise proved to be of the highest importance, so that he was enabled to send off efficient instructions to the naval commanders in the Chinese seas, as well as to the British political agents in various quarters. My introduction to the governor-general was thus most favourable to my views, and when I informed him that I had been attached to the British Embassy at Washington, he asked me no more questions. It never struck him that I might have borne another name, and he at once offered me employment in the civil service of India. This I accepted, and in a very few days set off on a special mission to the Nizam.

"At that sovereign's court I remained for upwards of a year, deeply engaged in diplomatic negotiations. No English newspaper ever reached me, and I thus continued in total ignorance of the events which so intimately regarded my character and good name in my native land. Having succeeded in all the objects for which I had been accredited to the Nizam's court, I was directed by a special courier bearing despatches from the governor-general to repair on a similar mission to the King of Inderabad. From various causes the small retinue with which I travelled dwindled away, and I arrived alone at the chief city of Inderabad. There I found myself a prisoner.

"Years elapsed; no inquiry was made after me, for the King of Inderabad, in order to accomplish his own aims, caused the rumour to be spread that I was no more. At length, in the year 1845, an English traveller was assassinated, by miscreants of the Thuggee caste, in a forest at no great distance from the city of Inderabad. Amongst his effects an English newspaper was discovered. Though sixteen years had then elapsed since the events at Oaklands, there was nevertheless a paragraph in that journal which alluded thereto. It was one of those paragraphs which frequently refer to any memorable occurrences connected with eminent families, and then, for the first time, I learned that my uncle had been murdered, that I was branded as his assassin, that neither myself nor the Duchess Eliza had ever since been heard of, and it was supposed that we as a guilty pair had fled together to some remote part of the world, to elude the consequences of our crimes. I will not

pause to depict the feelings with which I perused this statement, but I implored my freedom, and it was still refused.

"A short while afterward I succeeded in effecting my escape, bringing with me the immense wealth which the King of Inderabad had lavished in acknowledgment of various important services that I had rendered him. I returned to England, and my first care was to search the files of newspapers to gather a complete knowledge of all that had taken place after my precipitate flight from Oaklands. My hideous suspicions were confirmed; I comprehended but too well that my wretched brother must have been the murderer of his uncle, and that to save himself he had so combined all circumstances as to fix the guilt upon me. I need now say no more. In a short time, and in another place, I shall be called upon to continue a narrative which is so replete with sad and memorable details. But I have said sufficient to prove the complete innocence of the Duchess Eliza, and to show likewise how it was that so many long, long years elapsed ere I returned to this country to make inquiries into the past and to adopt the requisite measures for vindicating my own maligned reputation."

Lord Clandon ceased, and there were strong demonstrations of interest and sympathy through the court. The judge addressed him in a complimentary manner, winding up a most appropriate speech with the intimation that he was now at freedom. Lord Clandon bowed, and left the court in company with his friends.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

Although the right and title of the young Duke of Marchmont appeared to have been universally admitted, although he entered at once upon possession of the mansions, revenues, and vast domains, and although not the slightest opposition was from any quarter displayed, and no pettifogging attorney endeavoured to rake up a case with the view of being bought off so as not to throw trouble in the way, yet was it absolutely necessary, for the sake alike of form and law, that our young hero should prove his claims before a committee of privileges of the House of Lords. For this purpose the expiration of two or three months had to be awaited for the assembling of Parliament. Queen Indora therefore remained in England, because Lord Clandon was himself forced to tarry for that committee, and it was arranged that her Majesty and his lordship were to return to India together.

We will not now pause to describe how passed the time during this interval, but we will at once proceed to state that on the assembling of Parliament the lords appointed a committee to conduct the investigation. Mr. Coleman, assisted by able doctors of civil law, managed the entire case, and it was naturally his study to present the evidence in its most consecutive form to the noble committee.

The young Duke of Marchmont himself was the first witness in his own case. He stated that himself and his sister Christina had been brought up from their earliest infancy by a gentleman of the name of Ashton, who resided at a village in Westmoreland, at a distance of about twenty-five miles from Woodbridge. Christian and Christina had always been led to suppose that Mr. Ashton was their uncle, and that their own parents had died when they were babes.

Nothing had ever occurred, until the grand disclosure at Oaklands, to excite in their minds a suspicion that this story of their birth was otherwise than completely true. They were born at the end of May, 1830, and their birthday had always been regularly kept by Mr. Ashton. Some time before he died, he had given them certain relics which he represented as having belonged to their deceased mother, and these Christian produced. There was a long tress of raven hair; next there was a beautiful gold watch of delicate fashion and exquisite workmanship, with the cipher E graven upon the case; then there were two rings, one of which was a wedding-ring, the other of peculiar workmanship, with the cipher B graven upon a stone. Christian proceeded to relate that about three years previously Mr. Ashton had died suddenly, being stricken with an apoplectic fit, and for some little while after his death the twins continued to reside at the same house in the village. Then a certain Mr. Joseph Preston, of whom they had some little previous acquaintance, as he was a friend of Mr. Ashton's, signified to them that they must repair to London, so that they might be in the same city where he dwelt and that he might be enabled to attend to their welfare. He made them a liberal allowance, considering that their wants were small and that their habits were the very reverse of being extravagant, but he never gave them any information relative to their private affairs nor the pecuniary circumstances in which they had been left, nor did he explain the views which, if any, he entertained with regard to their future position. At the expiration of a few months Mr. Preston suddenly disappeared, and the twins were reduced to considerable temporary difficulties.

In answer to certain leading questions which were purposely put in order to elicit all the particulars that might bear upon his case, Christian stated that he had recently been shown some papers represented to be in the handwriting of the late Mr. Ashton, and which regarded the circumstances of the birth of himself and sister, and he could vouch that these papers were positively in the handwriting of the said deceased Mr. Ashton.

Depositions of all that had occurred at Oaklands in the month of September and beginning of October, 1829, were now put in and read before the lords forming the committee of privileges.

The next witness who was called was a female answering to the name of Jane Barclay. This was none other than she whom the reader has previously known as Crazy Jane, but she deserved the epithet no longer. Under a judicious system of treatment in the house of an eminent psychological physician, she had completely regained her intellect, and the poor mad wanderer of many years had, through the liberality and kindness of Lord Clandon, become restored to the possession of all her reasoning faculties. She was now decently, indeed handsomely apparelled, and though care and suffering and fatigues during that errant life which she had led had destroyed the beauty with which in her youth she was endowed, yet was her aspect marvellously improved, and no one who had known her as Crazy Jane would have recognized her now as Miss Barclay. She deposed to the fact that only a few days before the terrible scenes took place at Oaklands, in the year 1829, the Duchess Eliza had intimated to her that she fancied she was in a way to become a mother, but that she should not immediately inform the duke thereof, as she could not be altogether certain in so early a stage of pregnancy. In answer to questions that were put to her, Jane Barclay was positively enabled to state that if the duchess were correct in her idea, and if she had really lived to become a mother, the time of her confinement must have been about the very date mentioned by our young hero as that of the birthday of himself and his twin sister. Jane Barclay was enabled to swear that the watch marked with the letter E had belonged to the Duchess Eliza, but she did not remember ever to have seen the ring graven with the letter B in the possession of her Grace. As for the wedding-ring, she could not of course pretend to assert that it was her ladyship's, as there is so much similitude between the generality of such rings.

The next witness who appeared before the committee was a respectable-looking elderly woman, who deposed that her name was Mrs. Hutton, and that she had for many years resided in Cumberland near the Scottish border. She perfectly well recollected that in the autumn of 1829 a gentleman and a lady arrived at her house, and that the lady made an arrangement for her unoccupied apartments. The lady seemed plunged into the deepest distress; the gentleman had a strange, wild look, and both were young. The gentle-

man took his departure almost immediately after the engagement for the rooms was made. As the new lodger came totally unprovided with any effects beyond those which she had on her, and as the circumstances of their arrival, as well as their looks, excited her suspicion that there was something wrong, Mrs. Hutton had listened at the door of the parlour where they bade each other farewell. She distinctly heard the young gentleman say, "Adieu, Eliza, for ever!" but she could not catch the reply which the lady made. The gentleman went away.

For some hours after he was gone, the lady sat statue-like, as if plunged into the deepest despair. After awhile she inquired for a needle and thread; she took a small piece of velvet, and therewith she made a little bag. Into this she put her watch and her wedding-ring, as well as another ring, which she took from her bosom; she cut off a long lock of her hair, which was of raven darkness, and this likewise she put into the little bag, which she then sewed up. To the bag she attached a black ribbon, which she put around her neck, securing the bag in her bosom. All this she did in the presence of Mrs. Hutton, not amidst weeping, but in the silence of cold, blank despair. When her task was finished, she raised her countenance, looked at Mrs. Hutton, and said, "This shall be for my babe, if I live to give birth to it. The contents of that bag may some day serve as a clue, if ever such be needed, when I shall be dead and gone." Mrs. Hutton gently asked, "A clue to what?" whereat the lady suddenly started up and fixed upon her a look so full of wild suspicion that she was frightened lest the unfortunate being was going mad.

In the middle of the ensuing night the stranger lady — for she had given no name — abruptly quitted the house, leaving the front door wide open; so that Mrs. Hutton now felt convinced that grief had really turned her brain, and she resolved to speak to the local authorities in the morning. But the lady never came back. Some time afterward she read in an old newspaper that happened to fall into her hands a narrative of the tragic events which had occurred at Oaklands, and she was more than half-inclined to fancy that the strangers whom she had seen at her house were none other than Bertram Vivian and the Duchess Eliza; but afraid of getting into some trouble if it were

known that she had held any communication with persons who were accused of such crimes, she held her peace concerning them. When now asked to describe to the committee of privileges the lady who had thus remained a few hours beneath her roof so many years ago, she drew a portraiture which precisely corresponded with that of the unfortunate duchess.

The next witness was the proprietor of a lunatic asylum in Northumberland. This gentleman stated that in the fall of 1829 — and, so far as he could recollect, about a fortnight or three weeks after the dates mentioned by Mrs. Hutton — he one morning found a lady wandering in a wild state in the fields near his establishment. He conducted her to his house, and he found that she was completely deprived of her intellect. She was no sooner located there than she sank into a deep, silent, brooding dejection. He made inquiries throughout the neighbourhood and advertised in several local newspapers, but could obtain not the slightest clue relative to who she was. As she was evidently a per- of gentility, or at least had known better days, he and his wife took compassion on her, and when they found that she was in a way to become a mother they looked upon her as the victim of seduction who had most probably been discarded by her friends, and they therefore deemed it unnecessary — or rather, we should say, useless — to institute any additional research on her behalf. She never spoke a word, but was docile as a lamb, save and except if any one endeavoured to examine the little bag which she kept in her bosom, and then she grew frantic. They therefore for humanity's sake desisted from their endeavours to see what it contained, and still from motives of charity they kept her at their asylum. At the expiration of some weeks, however, she grew violent, and gave indications of approaching delirium. Her head was accordingly shaved, but during the night that followed she escaped from the asylum, and was heard of by the witness no more.

The next witness produced before their lordships was Jonathan Carnabie. He deposed that he was sexton and parish clerk at the village of Woodbridge, in Westmoreland. He recollected that in the beginning of the year 1830 he very early one morning beheld a female lying over a grave in the churchyard. He hastened to raise her; he thought

that she was dead, for she was pale, cold, and rigid as a corpse. She however proved to be merely in a deep swoon. He knew that she was a lady by her appearance, though her dress was much travel-soiled, holes were worn through her shoes and stockings, her feet were cut and bleeding. Jonathan bore her off to the parsonage, which was close by the church. The clergyman and his family were absent at the time on a visit to some friends in Lancashire, and there was no one but a female servant in the parsonage. This woman, however, did her best to recover the poor lady from her insensibility, and in time she succeeded. A medical man was sent for, and he at once pronounced that she was utterly bereft of her senses, that her reason was gone, that her mind was a perfect void. Indeed, her head had evidently been but very recently shaved, and it was therefore concluded she had escaped from some lunatic asylum. She had a little velvet bag attached to a ribbon around her neck, and the only sign of vital consciousness which she displayed was when any one attempted to touch this bag. The surgeon said it was useless to excite the poor lady to frenzy by taking the little bag from her in order to open it, for that it doubtless merely contained some trinkets which had been given to amuse her at the asylum whence she had escaped, and that therefore these trinkets themselves could not be supposed to afford any clue as to who she was or whence she had come.

The intelligence of the discovery of the poor lady in the churchyard speedily spread through the village, and reached the ears of a worthy gentleman of the name of Ashton, who was then residing at Woodbridge. He felt interested in the case, and he gave the poor lady a home. He watched the newspapers of Westmoreland and the surrounding counties, in order to see if any advertisement appeared describing who the lady might be, but no notification of the kind was given. She therefore became domiciled at Mr. Ashton's, and it was in the month of May, 1830, that she became the mother of twins. She never recovered her senses sufficiently to give the slightest account of herself, but she displayed the most affectionate tenderness toward her poor babes. Mr. Ashton, who was the most benevolent of men, treated her with a kindness which could not have been greater were he her father, and he bestowed his own name on the poor children.

As they were twins, he resolved to give them Christian names which should have a kindred significancy, or rather similitude, and hence those names of Christian and Christina. In the month of October the poor lady died, and she was buried in the churchyard at Woodbridge, Mr. Ashton causing the stone, with the simple inscription of "October, 1830," to be erected at the head of her grave. Very shortly afterward he removed to some place about five and twenty miles distant, and Jonathan Carnabie heard no more of him nor of the children. In answer to leading questions that were put, the old sexton drew a portraiture of the lady, which corresponded with that of the Duchess Eliza, and he produced the baptisimal certificate of the twins, their birthday being the one which, according to Christian's previous statement, they had always been wont to keep during the lifetime of Mr. Ashton.

Lord Clandon was the next witness who attended to give his evidence before the committee of privileges. He stated that immediately upon his return to England from India, he set off into Cumberland, and called at the house of Mrs. Hutton, where he had bidden farewell to the Duchess Eliza so many years back. Mrs. Hutton did not know him at first, but when he began instituting inquiries, she recognized him, and she grew frightened, for she had all along believed that he was really Bertram Vivian, to whom the foul deed of murder was imputed. He therefore admitted to her that he was that unfortunate individual, but he said enough to convince her that he was innocent of the crime charged against him. She then told him how the lady whom he had left at her house had enclosed certain articles of jewelry in a little velvet bag, and how she had fled, no doubt in a state of mental aberration. Lord Clandon took his departure from that house, and prosecuted his inquiries elsewhere, but all to no effect. Finding that his efforts were useless thus far, and being bent upon adopting the earliest possible measures to make his innocence manifest before the world, he employed a trustworthy individual (who, however, knew not his objects and motives) to pursue those inquiries which he was resolved never to abandon until he succeeded in obtaining some trace of the long-lost duchess or some clue to her fate. It will be remembered that when, a short time afterward, he was staying with his friend Sir William Ashton

in the neighbourhood of Liverpool, on the occasion of Lettice Rodney's trial, he fell in with Crazy Jane, whom he discovered to be Jane Barclay, the principal lady's-maid of the Duchess Eliza in years gone by; he provided a comfortable home for that unfortunate creature, but in the unsettled state of her intellect she abandoned it.

At about the same time that the intelligence of her disappearance reached Lord Clandon in London, he received a communication from the trusty agent whom he had left pursuing inquiries in the northern counties. This communication was to the effect that the agent had succeeded in discovering that after the flight of the Duchess Eliza from Mrs. Hutton's abode on the border of Cumberland, the unhappy lady had been for some while an inmate of a lunatic asylum in Northumberland. Thither Lord Clandon at once proceeded from London, and he heard all that the proprietor of that asylum could tell him upon the painful subject. Having some leisure upon his hands, he renewed his own personal inquiries throughout those northern counties, and at the same time he forgot not poor Crazy Jane. Of this latter he received some intelligence, and the result thereof was the visit which he paid to Woodbridge. There, according to his wont in prosecuting his inquiries in any new place relative to the long-lost Duchess Eliza, his first care was to examine the tombstones in the churchyard, in order to ascertain whether amidst those memorials of the dead he should chance to find one that would set at rest the mystery which enveloped the fate of the duchess, though he then knew not whether she were still an inhabitant of this world or had gone to the next. While inspecting those gravestones at Woodbridge, he beheld the one with the singularly laconic inscription. He fell in with Crazy Jane, and circumstances led him into communication with Jonathan Carnabie. From the old sexton's lips he learned sufficient to clear up all the mystery which had hitherto enveloped the fate of the unfortunate duchess. To his unspeakable wonderment he at the same time learned that the twins Christian and Christina Ashton, whom chance had previously thrown in his way in London, were the offspring of the deceased duchess, and they ignorant of the secret of their birth.

On his return to London, he sent for Christian from Ramsgate, and gave him a home. He examined the maternal

relics which the twins had preserved; he recognized the Duchess Eliza's watch, and the ring with the initial B upon it was the same which he had given to her in the days of their love at Oxford. That Christian and Christina were the lawful offspring of the Duke and Duchess of Marchmont, there could be no doubt, but still Lord Clandon felt that the evidence which he had as yet obtained would be scarcely sufficient to prove their claims, and, moreover, he himself could not appear publicly in any judicial investigation until his own innocence was made manifest. In these circumstances he thought it more prudent to retain the secret of their birth from the knowledge of the twins, so that they might not be buoyed up with hopes which perhaps never would be fulfilled. But in a short time providence threw additional testimony into his hands. On the occasion of one of the visits which he made into the neighbourhood of Oaklands for purposes connected with the plans which were in progress for the development of his innocence, he fell in with a woman whom he knew not at the time, but whom a hand-bill subsequently proved to be the murderess Barbara Smedley. On her person a sealed packet was found, and this packet contained certain papers intimately connected with the interests of the twins.

The next witness who appeared for examination before the committee of privileges was John Smedley. It will be remembered that he had surrendered himself up to justice in consequence of a hand-bill proclaiming that the mercy of the Crown would be to a certain degree extended to any one of the gang of miscreants connected with the house in Lambeth (the Burker himself excepted) who would give such information as should place the others in the hands of the police, or that the same benefit would be extended to that one of the same gang who would surrender up the Burker alone to the authorities. John Smedley had been the means of betraying the Burker, when disguised as a Jew, into the hands of the police, and it assuredly was not his fault that the miscreant Barney had subsequently escaped. Smedley therefore, on pleading guilty at the Old Bailey to the charge of murder, and confessing that he had helped to assassinate one Joseph Preston, had received the benefit of the royal mercy, according to the promise of the hand-bill, and, his life being spared, he was sentenced to transportation for the remainder

of his days. But inasmuch as his evidence was needed before the committee of privileges in respect to the Marchmont peerage, he was retained a prisoner in Newgate instead of being immediately sent out of the country. He now therefore appeared, in the custody of turnkeys, in the presence of that committee.

The testimony of John Smedley was to the following effect. Some time back he had at his house in Lambeth a lodger who passed by the name of Smith. This lodger desired that a letter might be taken to the address which appeared upon the envelope. It was directed to Mr. Ashton, at Mrs. Macaulay's, Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square. Smedley, his wife, and mother opened the letter instead of taking it to its address. They found by its contents that their lodger's real name was Joseph Preston, that he had lived on Cambridge Terrace, that he had sorely wronged Christian and Christina Ashton, and that under a plank in one of the rooms which he specified at his house in Cambridge Terrace they would find documents which might be of more or less importance to themselves. In consequence of perusing this letter, Smedley and his wife went to the house in Cambridge Terrace and possessed themselves of the documents, in the hope that their deliverance into the hands of Mr. and Miss Ashton might be productive of a reward. But on inquiring at Mrs. Macaulay's house, Barbara Smedley found that the twins had left, that they had fallen into poverty, and that there was no chance of obtaining a recompense at their hands. The Smedleys, however, kept the papers with the idea that they would some day prove lucrative, and these were the documents, together with Joseph Preston's letter, which Lord Clandon had found in the sealed packet upon the person of Barbara Smedley.

The documents were now produced before the committee, and Christian, be it recollected, had already proclaimed his conviction that those which bore the signature of the deceased Mr. Ashton were really in that gentleman's handwriting. One document consisted of a will which Mr. Ashton had left in favour of the twins, bequeathing them the sum of six thousand pounds, with Joseph Preston as the guardian and executor. Another document was an affectionate letter to the twins, penned by Mr. Ashton in case he should die before he considered that they had reached an age when they

ought to be made acquainted with all the secrets and mysteries attending their birth. A third document, also written by the deceased Mr. Ashton, contained a full narrative of those secrets and mysteries, in precise accordance with the evidence given by Jonathan Carnabie. The remaining document was Joseph Preston's letter to the twins, which the Smedleys had intercepted. It told them that, smitten with remorse for his conduct toward those who had been entrusted to his guardianship, he implored their forgiveness; that he was already steeped in pecuniary difficulties when he became their guardian at Mr. Ashton's death; that he had made away with the six thousand pounds bequeathed them by that gentleman; that the only atonement, slight though it were, which he could now offer, was to place them in possession of certain documents which he had found in Mr. Ashton's writing-desk, and which he had not intended to give up to them until they attained their majority; that these documents would be discovered in a peculiar recess at his house in Cambridge Terrace, for that in the precipitation of his flight from that residence he had forgotten to take them with him.

The reading of these documents terminated the evidence on behalf of our young hero as a claimant for the Marchmont peerage. The lords forming the committee of privileges inquired if there were any opposition, and being answered in the negative, they deliberated together for a few minutes. The result of their conference was an intimation to the counsel appearing on Christian's behalf that it was entirely unnecessary for those learned gentlemen to address their lordships upon the evidence, as the mind of the committee was already made up. A decision was then solemnly pronounced in Christian's favour; he was recognized as the just claimant and the rightful possessor of the Marchmont peerage, and he thereupon received the congratulations of all who were so deeply interested in our young hero's welfare.

CHAPTER XVII

MORE EXPLANATIONS

One of the first acts of Christian and Christina after the occurrence of the memorable events at Oaklands was to proceed into Westmoreland and visit the spot where reposed the remains of their mother. They were naturally anxious that these remains should be transferred to the family vault of the Marchmonts, and not be suffered to lie in the obscurity of a remote churchyard, but it was suggested by Lord Clandon that this proceeding should be postponed until after the committee of privileges had decided upon Christian's claims, and when the complete narrative of the past would go forth to the world, fully proving the innocence of the deceased Duchess Eliza. Now, therefore, that the decision of that committee had been rendered, and that the tragic history was known in all its sad and romantic details, the wish of the twins was about to be fulfilled in all its filial piety.

A second visit was paid by the young Duke of Marchmont and Lady Christina Vivian to the little village of Woodbridge, and before the humble grave was disturbed they went alone together to weep for the last time over that spot which had for so many years been the resting-place of their unfortunate parent. Clad in deep mourning, that amiable youth and his charming sister bent over the grave, moistening with their tears the turf which was soon to be disturbed. They knelt there, and they prayed; long did they contemplate the stone with the laconic inscription, and embracing each other fondly, they both alike felt that if any reason were wanting to cement the affection which had hitherto subsisted between them, it was now supplied by the respect due to the memory of their perished mother. And when for some time

they had been left alone at the grave, their loved and revered relative, Lord Clandon, joined them there, and he too knelt and prayed, he too moistened that turf with his tears, and he too in sadness contemplated the stone memorial which the kindness of a stranger had long years back placed at the head of that grave. It was a touching scene, and one the full pathos of which must be left to the imagination, for it cannot be described in words.

The ceremony which had brought the twins and Lord Clandon to Woodbridge then commenced, they themselves remaining the while at the parsonage house. The grave was opened; the coffin was exhumed and placed in a hearse that was in readiness for its reception. A mourning-coach conveyed the young duke, his sister, and Lord Clandon to the nearest railway-station, and they proceeded with the remains of the deceased duchess to Oaklands. There the coffin was consigned to the family vault in the neighbouring church, and the Duchess Eliza slept by the side of her husband.

Lord Clandon had now no longer any motive for remaining in England, but before he took his departure his nuptials with Queen Indora were solemnized. The ceremony was performed with comparative privacy, at the villa which her Majesty had occupied during her residence in London; Lady Christina Vivian, Miss Isabella Vincent, and two other young ladies belonging to one of the noblest families of the aristocracy acted as bridesmaids. Immediately after the marriage the bridegroom and bride repaired to pass a week at Oaklands, and at the expiration of that time the moment arrived for them to take leave of those in whom they were so deeply interested. We have before said that there is no happiness in this world without its alloy, and the happiness of the newly married pair was shadowed by the necessity of separating from Christian and Christina. Indeed, when the moment of parting came, it seemed as if it were felt on both sides that they were never to see each other again; and profound was the affliction of our young heroine on receiving the farewell embrace of that royal lady toward whom she owed so large a debt of gratitude and whom she loved so well. Lord Clandon bestowed some excellent advice upon Christian before taking leave of him, although his lordship had the fullest confidence in the rectitude of his ducal relative. The queen and Lord Clandon took their

departure, attended by a small suite, amongst which was the faithful Mark. They left the British shores to return to the kingdom of Inderabad, where Indora was to take her seat on the throne that awaited her, and to place by her side on that regal elevation the husband whom she would make a king, and whose presence she knew would be so welcome to the millions of her subjects already enjoying the benefits of his enlightened policy.

We may here avail ourselves of an opportunity to give a few little explanations which will complete the elucidation of all the mysteries of the past. The reader has already perceived how Indora had learned in her own native city the real name of him who passed by the fictitious one of Clement Redcliffe, and how from the passionate language which had burst from his lips at the time she gleaned enough to prove that he had just made the discovery of how he laboured under a frightful imputation in his own native land. After he had escaped from Inderabad she followed him to England, and she obtained an interview with him, as recorded in one of the earliest chapters in this narrative. She comprehended that he was bent upon adopting measures to prove his innocence, for she knew him too well to believe for a single instant that he could ever have been guilty of a crime.

Then it was that the romantic idea of secretly succouring him in his endeavour to demonstrate that innocence flashed to the mind of the fond and devoted Indora. But having only a dim idea of the circumstances attending that crime of which he was accused, Indora ordered Mark to procure the files of an English newspaper,that she might obtain a perfect knowledge of all that it concerned her to know. In that newspaper she read the particulars of the tragedy at Oaklands in the year 1829, and she had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that as Bertram Vivian himself was assuredly innocent, his brother Hugh must be the guilty person. To visit Oaklands, to behold the spot which had proved the scene of the tragedy, to glean whatsoever she might be possibly enabled to pick up, and to avail herself of any circumstances that might transpire toward the furtherance of her aims, — these were the ideas that naturally began to occupy the attention of Indora. Thus when Madame Angelique called at Shrubbery Villa, and in the course of con-

versation proposed a visit to Oaklands, Indora readily accepted the offer, for though she comprehended the treacherous reason for which it was made, she had no fear of being unable to combat against the designs of the Duke of Marchmont. Besides, she wished to meet that man face to face, that she might form her own idea of his disposition, and judge to what an extent it might subsequently be worked upon through the medium of his conscience.

Now, it happened that Bertram Vivian himself, in adopting measures for the demonstration of his innocence, paid occasional stealthy visits to the neighbourhood of Oaklands, — rather perhaps to trust to the chapter of accidents than with any precise and settled plan of action in view at the time. On the occasion of one of those visits, and being concealed amongst the trees, he to his astonishment beheld Indora walking in the grounds with the old steward. He fancied that she must have been beguiled thither by some treachery, especially as he knew that Madame Angelique had conceived designs against herself and Sagoonah, — those designs of which he had given her a hint, and against which he had warned her in a brief note written from Mortimer Street. Therefore, on finding Indora at Oaklands, Bertram Vivian was resolved to watch over her safety, and he beheld her take her departure. His brother had in the meantime come to Oaklands, and Bertram could not resist the temptation of endeavouring to work upon his fears as one of the first steps toward the accomplishment of his aims.

He had no difficulty in effecting a stealthy entrance into the mansion, and he happened to conceal himself in that very room to which his brother and Purvis penetrated that they might ascertain whether Indora had replaced the dagger in the drawer whence she had taken it. Bertram was fearful of being discovered, for he knew that his brother was villain enough to hand him over to the grasp of the law, and he at that time was totally unprepared with any proof of his innocence. He therefore dashed the candle from his brother's hand, and he effected his escape from the spot amidst the utter darkness in which he thus suddenly involved the room. But he had previously overheard the conversation which took place between his brother and Purvis in respect to the dagger, and the motive of Indora's visit to Oaklands began to be apparent to his mind. He saw that she had

not been inveigled thither by treachery, and he conjectured that it was on account of his own affairs that she had come. He further surmised that she must have had some particular conversation with Purvis, and he was determined to ascertain.

He therefore introduced himself stealthily in the night-time to the old steward's room; he revealed his name, and he subsequently found a faithful assistant in Purvis. The conduct of Indora made a deep impression upon Bertram's mind; it was another proof of her devoted love for him. He saw that she was labouring in his behalf, and so many evidences of her affection went far to mitigate the impression that he had mainly owed his lengthened captivity in Inderabad to the influence which she possessed with her father. After his visit to Woodbridge and his discovery that the Duchess Eliza had long been dead, he waited upon Indora at her villa, and he then informed her that the circumstances which had previously prevented him from giving her aught beyond a vague hope had ceased to exist. The reader now comprehends the real significancy of some of those incidents which at the time of their occurrence were involved in a certain degree of mystery.

We need hardly add that liberal rewards were bestowed, not only by Lord Clandon, but also by the young Duke of Marchmont, upon all those to whom they had any reason to experience gratitude. The proprietor of the lunatic asylum in Northumberland, who had so charitably given a home to the unfortunate Duchess Eliza, had every ground to be satisfied with the liberality of Christian and Lord Clandon; Jonathan Carnabie went back to Woodbridge with more than sufficient to enable him to live without work, if he thought fit, for the remainder of his days; and Purvis, the faithful old steward, was likewise a special object of the bounty of those whom he had served. Over the grave of the deceased Mr. Ashton a monument was erected, bearing a beautifully composed tribute of the gratitude of the twins for the true paternal kindness which they had received from one to whom they were in no way related.

Now that Queen Indora had left England, Christina took up her abode altogether with her brother at Marchmont House, and there they were visited by all the élite of the aristocracy, as well as by several friends whom Christian

had acquired previous to the occurrence of those events which had proclaimed the secret of his birth. Thus, for instance, Sir Edgar and Lady Beverley, Sir Frederick and Lady Latham, and Captain Stanley were frequent visitors at Marchmont House; nor must we omit to observe that Sir William Stanley himself, when passing any time in the metropolis, was a welcome guest in Belgrave Square. Lord Octavian Meredith and Zoe still remained abroad, but frequently did Christina correspond with her friend, Armytage's daughter, who indeed had proved one of the very first to send written congratulations to both herself and her brother on their elevation to a brilliant position. The nuptials of Christian with Isabella Vincent were to take place when six months should have elapsed from the date of the events at Oaklands, and in the meantime the young lovers frequently saw each other.

One day a cab drove up to the door of Marchmont House, but the occupant of it would not immediately get out. She — for this occupant was of the feminine gender — was attired in her Sunday apparel; she appeared in all the glory of a new silk gown, a very fashionable bonnet, her gold watch and chain, and a pair of lemon-coloured kid gloves. She delivered a message to one of the domestics, which the man forthwith took up to the young duke and Lady Christina Vivian. It was to the effect that Mrs. Macaulay requested permission to pay her most dutiful respects to his Grace and to Lady Christina. The twins at once desired that she should be shown up, and the domestic accordingly proceeded to hand Mrs. Macaulay out of the cab with every demonstration of respect.

As she followed the footman through the marble hall and up the superb staircase, she could not help giving half-audible utterance to the thoughts which were passing in her mind.

"Well," said the worthy woman, "this is indeed a palace, and only think that I should have what's called the *entrée* of it, and be treated by this powdered and lace-bedizened gentleman" — thus alluding to the lackey — "just for all the world as if I myself was a real lady! Ah, what a splendid palace, and what a lodging-house it would make! Why, there must be at least a dozen sets of apartments on the first floors alone! They'd let each at four guineas a week. Four times twelve are forty-eight, — that's forty-

eight guineas a week, and one might add another twenty guineas for the letting of the upper rooms! Only conceive such a lodging-house, — it would be a fortune in a single year! And the quantities of cold victuals that would be left and never asked for! Why, if every lodger only left the leg of a fowl, and a single glass of wine in his decanter, it would keep a regiment! And then, too, people living in such a house would never think of locking their tea-caddies, and marking the cheese and the bread to see that the servants didn't touch them! Oh, what a lodging-house!"

Mrs. Macaulay was lost in mingled awe and wonderment at the vast field which she had thus opened for her own contemplation, and the probability is that she would have gone on wondering as long as there were any more stairs to ascend, if the domestic had been conducting her to the top of the house. But as he halted on the first landing, and threw open a door to announce in a very loud voice, "Mrs. Macaulay," the worthy woman suddenly regained her self-possession, and gathered herself together, as it were, for her appearance before the twins.

Although she had mustered the courage to pay this visit, she felt by no means certain with regard to the nature of the reception she should experience. She knew that she might reckon upon being received with civility, but judging the world according to her own somewhat circumscribed notions, she fancied that the young duke would prove coldly dignified and Lady Christina politely distant. Great was her surprise, therefore, and infinite her joy, when the young duke and his sister, hastening forward, caught each a hand and gave her the kindest welcome. They had not seen her since their change of circumstances, for immediately after the events at Oaklands Christian had taken up his abode at Marchmont House, and Lord Clandon, after his release from Newgate, had repaired to the same destination, so that there had been no occasion for our young hero to call at the lodging-house in Mortimer Street. When she found that she thus experienced so friendly a reception, Mrs. Macaulay could not keep back her tears, and she whimpered out her thanks, as well as her congratulations, on the change of circumstances which had overtaken the twins.

"Dear me," she said, sinking down upon a sofa, "to think that I should live to see you, Master Christian, a duke,

and you, Miss Christina, a lady! But I always thought there was something distinguished about you both, and I said so to Mrs. Wanklin, and to Mrs. Chowley, which keeps the baby-linen warehouse in the Tottenham Court Road. Well, dear me, what strange things do happen in this life! You remember Captain Bluff, my lord? Well, he got promoted from a Gravesend steamer to a Margate one, and then he was so high and mighty that he refused to marry Miss Chowley, and so she went into hysterics, while her mother went off to her lawyer. And then there was an action for breach of promise, and I was summoned as a witness to appear before the bigwigs at Westminster Hall. I'm sure I never should have passed through the ordeal if it hadn't been that I had previously taken a little drop of rum which my new lodger had left in his bottle the night before."

"And pray how did it all end?" asked Christian, with a smile.

"Why, Captain Bluff proved that he had never promised, but had only thrown sheep's eyes at the young lady. So he left the court triumphant, with a lot of Margate and Ramsgate steamboat captains; and they had a grand dinner at Blackwall, while Mrs. Chowley had to pay all the costs. Ah, it made a hole into the profits of the baby-linen, I can tell you! But dear me, to think that Mr. Redcliffe should have been a lord, after all, and that since he should have married a queen! So I've had a real duke and a real lord living at my house, and all the neighbours look up to me as something very superior indeed."

"And what of your friend Mrs. Sifkin?" asked Christian, still speaking with a smile at Mrs. Macaulay's garrulity.

"Oh, she and me are more at loggerheads than ever," responded the worthy woman. "She's so jealous and envious, you know, and when she hears from the neighbours how I've had the honour of being received here to-day, I'm sure it will drive her stark staring mad, if anything in this world can. I hesitated at first whether to come and pay my respects, but at last I said to my new servant, says I, 'Jane, Captain Flasher' — that's my new lodger — 'Captain Flasher doesn't dine at home to-day, so you may just give me an early dinner off his cold beef, — which won't keep till to-morrow, — and then I'll prank myself off and go and call at Marchmont House.' Captain Flasher is a very nice

man, and doesn't think of locking up the tea-caddy or decanting his own wine, or any meanness of that sort. Ah, my lord, you remember those odious Johnsons, who had my second floor? Well, they've actually gone to live with Mrs. Sifkin, and I'm so glad of it. It's almost the worst punishment I could wish the woman for all her slander and bad conduct toward myself. They'll punish her with their meanness, I'll be bound."

In this manner did Mrs. Macaulay rattle on until the young duke and Lady Christina Vivian began to get tired of her gossip, — when they gave her luncheon; and she shortly afterward took her departure, bearing with her several presents which the twins made her. On returning to her own abode, she purposely got up a wrangle with the cabman in respect to the amount of the fare, in order that she might have an opportunity of reminding him over and over again that she had been to Marchmont House and back. Her object was thus to proclaim the fact not merely for the immediate behoof of her neighbours, but likewise for that of passers-by, and when she had said the same thing in a very loud voice a dozen times over, she ended by paying the cabman his full demand, with sixpence extra, — a piece of generosity on her part which must be taken as a proof of the excellent humour into which her visit had put her.

A couple of days after the visit of Mrs. Macaulay, the young Duke of Marchmont was favoured with the company of some other old acquaintances. It was about two o'clock when three individuals, of unmistakable foreign aspect, presented themselves at the entrance of the mansion in Belgrave Square. Their raiment was not remarkable for any of those attractions which constitute "fashion" in respect to the masculine garb. On the contrary, it seemed as if the Holywell Street of some Continental city might be referred to as the source whence emanated the garments of those three personages. Truth compels us to declare that they looked as if they were the most devoted disciples of the Genius of Seediness. As for linen, an exceeding maliciousness might be inclined to represent that they wore none at all, though a more charitable surmise would only go to the extent that it was too dirty to be displayed. Their coats were buttoned completely up to their throats, and neither inside their stocks of rusty black nor the sleeves of

those coats could the slightest glimpse be caught of linen, calico, or long-cloth. At the same time that they presented themselves at the entrance of Marchmont House, the hall porter became aware of a somewhat strong odour, compounded of onions, tobacco-smoke, and perspiration, and he made a wry face, for his nostrils were unaccustomed to such a scent in the aristocratic region of Belgrave Square.

The three worthies at once saw that the porter both sniffed and eyed them suspiciously, whereat they drew themselves up with the mightiest airs of importance, and with their somewhat dirty hands began stroking their beards and playing with their moustaches. Then one of the gentlemen said to the porter, "We sall be calling for to ask for his Grace, de yong Duke of Marchmont."

"His Grace is engaged," answered the porter, somewhat curtly, although he was naturally a very civil, obliging, and well-behaved man, for otherwise he would not have been retained in Christian's service.

"Den we sall be for to wait," said the individual who was acting as spokesman. "You not know us. We vare great men in our own country, great men in our faderland."

The porter looked as if he thought that it was a great pity they ever came out of their fatherland, for he was by no means inclined to believe that they could be great personages in England.

"You sall be having de honour of knowing me, mine goot mans," continued the spokesman. "We are de Chevalier Gumbinnen, de lord chamberlain of dat high and mighty prince de reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha. Dis am de Chevalier Kadger, de equerry to de same grand duke; and dis am de Count Frumpenhausen, de Gold Tick to him Royal Highness de vare same grand duke."

The hall porter placed his hand to his forehead with a bewildered air, as all these magnificent titles were as mercilessly and overpoweringly hurled at him, but still there was that exceedingly unaristocratic odour infecting the atmosphere, and producing with the unfortunate hall porter a sensation of sickness.

"What do these fellows want?" asked a powdered lackey, coming forward. "There, be off with you, my good man," he added, proffering the Chevalier Gumbinnen a few pence.

"The police are very strict in respect to beggars and vagrants in this quarter of the town, and if you are taken up you will be sent to the House of Correction."

"Beggars, begar!" cried the Chevalier Gumbinnen, plunging his fingers into his whiskers, grasping them wildly, and tearing at them as if they were mad. "De insult is one for which you sall be sent off vid one flea in your ear. You mans not know us. We vare great men in our country, we vare rich, we great lords, we belong to de court of de brudder of your Prince Albert."

The footman stared at this announcement for a moment, but suddenly bursting out into a laugh, he said, good-naturedly, "Well, you are three of the rummest fellows for begging impostors that I ever saw."

The Chevalier Gumbinnen gave vent to his rage in another attack upon his red whiskers, but the Chevalier Kadger stepped forward, presenting a very dirty card, and saying, "You sall take dis to your master, young mans, and you sall soon see de wonderful effect dis name sall be for producing."

"You had better take up the card, John," said another lackey, who had just stepped forward, and who spoke these words in an audible tone. "I have heard something of these fellows before."

The footman to whom the card was given accordingly took it up to the drawing-room where Christian was seated, Christina being engaged with some young lady friends in the music-room at the time.

Our young hero was astonished as well as annoyed to find that his former acquaintances of Mivart's Hotel had turned up again. He however thought it would be too discourteous to refuse to grant them an interview, and he bade the footman conduct them up to the drawing-room. The three Germans accordingly made their appearance, — and a very shabby one it was. The young Duke of Marchmont could not help thinking that if they were really still attached to the household of the reigning sovereign of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha, the fortunes of that high and mighty potentate must have experienced considerable dilapidation. But he had not many instants for any deliberate reflection at all, inasmuch as the Chevalier Gumbinnen darted forward and seized Christian in an embrace, with which, considering

the mingled savour of onions, cubas, and perspiration, he could have very well dispensed.

"Mine vare goot friend!" exclaimed the Chevalier, "you sall be for breaking mine heart with vare great joy for again to see you."

"Begar! his Grace sall have much improved. Him quite de great nobleman," and now it was the Chevalier Kadger who took his turn in bestowing an affectionate embrace.

"Mine noble friends, mine vare goot friends!" cried Frumphenhausen, preparing to inflict the same token of warm feeling toward the young duke; but he was disappointed, for Christian, finding these compliments to be intolerable, hastily stepped behind the table, and pointing to chairs, requested his three visitors to be seated.

The Chevalier Gumbinnen — who at the time of their former acquaintance could scarcely speak a word of English, but who had since picked up a crude smattering thereof — continued to act as spokesman. He explained how delighted himself and his companions were when on arriving in England a few days back, they accidentally learned that the former secretary to their illustrious master was now Duke of Marchmont. The chevalier went on to say that the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha was coming in the course of the week to pass some little time in the British metropolis, and that his Royal Highness had therefore sent over those three officers of his household to have everything in readiness at Mivart's Hotel by the time of his arrival. Hence their presence in London, and as a matter of course (according to the Chevalier Gumbinnen's account) they could not possibly avoid the pleasure of paying their respects to the Duke of Marchmont.

Christian listened with a cold reserve, for he knew very well that Gumbinnen, though in England a chevalier and a lord chamberlain, was when in Germany nothing but a valet, that the Chevalier Kadger, in England an equerry, was in Germany a footman, and that Frumpenhausen, a count and a Gold Stick when on his travels, was in his own native land a lackey with a brass-headed cane. The young Duke of Marchmont moreover knew that these beggarly fellows were capable of any meanness in order to obtain money or refreshments, and that although they could not help their miserable poverty, yet that they had no right to

assume the titles and the consequence which they affected on the British soil. He was resolved, therefore, not to offer them so much even as a glass of wine, nor to give them any encouragement to renew their visit.

"You vare nice house here, milor," said the Chevalier Gumbinnen, looking around the room. "You sall be remembering de bottles of wine we was used to drink togeder when we was such vare goot friends. Ah, mine goot lord, dat was at de hotel, but now you sall be having de wine in your own cellar, and all you sall have to do is just for to ring de bell, and up comes the champagne. It vare hot to-day, and me vare tirsty."

"Begar! it sall be vare hot," said the Chevalier Kadger, "and dat — how you call it? — de lonch which we sall have eaten was vare salt. We sall be vare dry. Yes, himmel! me be tirsty as de dayvil."

Not choosing to take any of these hints, Christian said, "I saw your friend Baron Raggidbak some time ago, in a condition — "

"Ah! dat Raggidbak vare great raskal," ejaculated Gumbinnen; "him great scamp, him big tief, him vare bad man indeed."

"Him damn bad!" added the Chevalier Kadger, emphatically.

"Him make way wid de splendid harness of his Royal Highness," cried Frumpenhausen.

"I believe," said Christian, very quietly addressing himself to the count, "that you had some little unpleasant adventure at Buckingham Palace on the night of the supper, — or at least such was the rumour on the occasion."

"It all lies!" exclaimed Frumpenhausen, colouring tremendously. "De peoples sall be vare scandalous at times about us great folks. De Inglis newspapers vare wicked, dey tell de great lies. If dey was in our faderland, dey go to gaol, and de journals dey sall be — what you call it? — suppressed. Me tell your lordship one great, great secret," continued Frumpenhausen, assuming a most confidential air. "His Royal Highness our grand duke he sall be coming over to dis country for to make de representations — you understand, milor? — to his vare goot brudder de Prince Albert, dat de Inglis press too free, and you sall

be for seeing dat de Prince Albert use his influence wid de gobernment to put down your free press."

"Never!" exclaimed Christian, warmly. "If the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha entertains such an idea, he never was more mistaken in his life. As for me, I am without prejudices; but since you have assumed an air of confidence, I must tell you very plainly that, judging from what I saw of your master when I was in his service, the less frequently he visits the British realm, the more agreeable ought it to be to the British people."

"Vare goot! vare goot!" exclaimed the Chevalier Gumbinnen. "De oftener he sall come to England, de more agreeable to de British peoples! Dat is excellent! But sall I ring de bell, milor, for dat wine you was so kind for to offer us, as we are so tirsty?"

"I must tell you very frankly," answered the Duke of Marchmont, rising from his seat, "that I have no longer any time to bestow upon you."

"Vare goot!" exclaimed the Chevalier Gumbinnen, "dat is excellent! You vare sorry, milor, your time sall be so precious. Well, den, we no intrude. Ah, begar! me forgot my purse! Me have sometings to buy for his Royal Highness, and your Grace sall be so goot as to be for going to lend me de five guineas I sall be wanting."

"You must apply to some one else as your banker," answered Christian, coldly.

"Ah, vare goot!" cried the Chevalier Gumbinnen. "we sall be for going to de banker. We sall be too late, and we sall be for taking de cab. Your Grace sall be so goot as to lend us de loose silver for to pay for de cab."

Christian disdainfully tossed some silver upon the table, and there was immediately a scramble on the part of those high officers attached to the court of the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha. Our young hero, infinitely disgusted, rang the bell somewhat violently, and walked to the window. The count and the two chevaliers shook their heads at one another, as much as to imply that they had got all they could expect from the young nobleman, and they accordingly took their departure from Marchmont House. Adjourning to some tavern in the neighbourhood, they forthwith began to regale themselves on tobacco and pots

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Photogravure from an old engraving

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Photogravure from an old engraving

of beer, in which refreshments they expended the whole of the money received from Christian.

It was perfectly true that they had come to prepare the way for the arrival of that wretched ducal pauper, the master whom they served, and were it not that the proprietor of Mivart's Hotel was afraid of offending the British court and aristocracy, apartments in that establishment would not have been placed at the disposal of the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha and his suite of beggarly tatterdemalions. We should add that the fellow calling himself Count Frumpenhausen had been reinstated in the favour of the grand duke after the supper adventure at Buckingham Palace, and that on coming over to England on this present occasion it was hoped that incident would have been forgotten. Great therefore was the vexation of the two chevaliers and count on finding that the young Duke of Marchmont made allusion thereto in so pointed a manner.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAPTAIN STANLEY

The reader cannot have forgotten how Captain Stanley rescued Christina from the power of the Burker in the lane near Shrubbery Villa, Notting Hill. The young officer was at once smitten with a feeling of interest on behalf of that beauteous girl, and he had solicited permission to call at the villa. Christina had assured him that Queen Indora would give him a welcome reception, and she thus, with the strictest propriety and modesty, avoided the encouragement of a visit to herself specially. But almost immediately after that incident which rendered them acquainted came the hurricane of events that was to accomplish so material a change in the circumstances of the twins. For some few weeks Captain Stanley saw Christina no more, but after awhile he met her again at Marchmont House, and the interest he had at first experienced in her quickly expanded into a still more tender feeling.

Now in his twenty-fifth year, Robert Stanley was remarkably handsome. His countenance not only possessed the perfection of masculine beauty, but it likewise seemed as a mirror to reflect all the generous emotions of his soul. Of the highest principles, of untarnished reputation, of a lofty intelligence, and of fascinating manners, as well as being the heir to a wealthy baronetcy, Captain Stanley might have almost made his own choice of a wife amongst the beauties of the society which by his position he frequented, but never until he beheld Christina had he seen one of her sex who made any impression upon his heart. It was therefore a first love that he now experienced, and the more he was enabled to study the character and disposition of the young Duke of Marchmont's sister, the better did he

appreciate her worth, and the more did she become endeared to him by her many amiable qualities.

A strong friendship had sprung up between the young Duke of Marchmont and Captain Stanley, and the latter therefore gladly availed himself of this circumstance to visit frequently at the mansion in Belgrave Square. The regiment to which he belonged was now quartered at Hounslow, and therefore a short ride at any time took the young officer to Marchmont House. Notwithstanding the manly frankness of his disposition, there was a considerable degree of diffidence associated with the feelings of his love for Christina. The natural delicacy of his mind, moreover, suggested to him that he ought not to proffer his attentions too pointedly while the young lady still wore a deep mourning garb on account of the incidents that had lately occurred at Oaklands, and the same reason prevented him from confidentially whispering to her brother that her beauty and her good qualities had made so strong an impression upon his heart. Thus, as several weeks passed on, the young Duke of Marchmont suspected not that Robert Stanley was enamoured of his sister, while Lady Christina Vivian herself was equally unsuspicious that she had thus become the object of his attachment.

Six months had now elapsed since the memorable events at Oaklands, and the period fixed for the nuptials of the young Duke of Marchmont and Miss Isabella Vincent was close at hand. Previous to the arrival of the happy moment, Christian resolved to pass a week or ten days at Oaklands, that he might there entertain a select party of his numerous friends. Christina as a matter of course accompanied her brother, and amongst the guests were Sir Edgar and Lady Beverley, Sir Frederick and Lady Anastatia Latham, and Captain Stanley. Isabella Vincent was remaining at her mansion at Kensington, in company with an elderly female relative, making preparations for the bridal. Sir William Stanley was invited to join the party at Oaklands, but he had previously been summoned to London by the government for some purpose with which his son remained unacquainted. We should observe that Sir William was a man of considerable influence in the northern counties, one of which he had until within the last few years represented in Parliament, but having been compelled to visit India, he

had at the time given up his senatorial duties, and since his return from the East had found no opportunity of resuming them.

When the party assembled at Oaklands, Captain Stanley began to think that the time had now arrived when he might with propriety afford indications that he aspired to Christina's hand. The nuptials of the young duke were approaching, the period for mourning was expiring, there was gaiety at the ducal country-seat, and Stanley considered that it was no longer necessary to veil his feelings toward Christina so studiously as he had hitherto done. Be it understood that he was utterly unacquainted with everything that had passed between herself and Lord Octavian Meredith; he knew not that her affections had ever been in the slightest degree engaged, and though he had as yet no reason to flatter himself that he had made any impression upon her heart, he nevertheless imagined the field to be fairly open for an honourable courtship. He reflected, however, that a lady of Christina's rank, the sister of a duke, might well aspire to a lofty alliance, and that both she and her brother might look forward to the time when an aristocratic coronet might by marriage grace her brows. But on the other hand, Robert Stanley likewise knew that Christina had no ambition, and that where she fixed her affections she would bestow her hand. He was likewise aware that her brother would consult her happiness rather than her interests in a more worldly sense, and thus he had no fear that his addresses would be repudiated on the ground that Lady Christina Vivian aimed at a loftier alliance.

It was on the second morning after the arrival of the party at Oaklands that Christina rose early and rambled forth by herself in the grounds. The spring season was yielding to the warmer influence of summer; nature was all smiling around her. The spacious gardens were embellished with the choicest floral beauties, the birds were carolling blithely in the trees, the fountains were catching in their crystal jets the beams of the Orient sun. The dew was still upon the grass; there was a sweet freshness in the air, and the young lady felt her spirits rise as she passed through those beauteous grounds belonging to the immense domain that owned the lordship of her brother. Proceeding beyond the gardens, she entered the fields, and insensibly continued her ramble

farther than she had intended when first setting out. Presently she reached a stile, at which point she halted to survey the undulating landscape that lay beyond, when all of a sudden so strange a figure emerged from behind the hedge that Lady Christina was startled and almost affrighted.

This was a tall woman whose emaciated frame was wrapped in the rags of beggary. In reality she was not forty years of age, but she looked at least fifty, so terrible were the ravages which houseless wanderings, care, misery, and privation had made upon her. She was emaciated to such a degree that there seemed to be nought but skin upon her bones; her cheeks had fallen in, her eyes were deeply set in their cavernous sockets, and her hair was grizzled. In respect to garments, if mere rags could be so denominated, they were only just sufficient for the purposes of decency. But there was not only misery expressed in the appearance of this creature; there was also a certain wildness of look which bespoke incipient madness or else a reckless desperation. But there was still in her dark eyes a remnant of the light which had belonged to them in other days, and when, on so suddenly starting up from behind the hedge, she flung her glances on Christina, there was something which appeared so threatening in them that it was no wonder if the young lady felt still more frightened than she even was at first.

Christina flung a look around; she was at a considerable distance from the mansion, and no other human being but this horrible woman was within sight. Christina was smitten with the dread of being exposed to the fury of some dangerous lunatic, and though by no means inclined to childish terrors, yet she could not help wishing that she had not wandered so far from home. It was, however, as much from charitable motives as from this feeling of apprehension that Christina hastily thrust her hand into her pocket to draw forth her purse, and taking thence two or three pieces of silver, she proffered them to the woman. But in so doing she showed that her purse contained gold as well, and on raising her looks toward the wretched stranger's countenance, her fears were all revived or rather most poignantly enhanced at the manner in which the woman was now surveying her.

"You belong to that proud mansion," said the woman, "and you are Lady Christina Vivian. You know not how much both you and your brother are indebted to me for the

recovery of your rights. But if you did know it, you would not offer me, or at least you ought not to offer me those miserable silver coins when your purse contains so much gold."

"Who can you possibly be," asked Christina, in astonishment, "that you in any way contributed to the results of which you have spoken? Show me that you really did what you proclaim — "

"Ah, I spoke foolishly," ejaculated the woman; "it is not for me to tell you who I am. But by my appearance you can judge enough," she continued, with deep, concentrated bitterness, "to understand that I am not amongst the fortunate ones of this life. For months past I have endured sufficient misery to crush the very life out of me, — a misery so great that if its amount were divided amongst a dozen different people the proportion would still be intolerable for each. How often think you, young lady, that within those months of which I am speaking I have closed my eyes in rest beneath a sheltering roof? How often think you that I have sunk down exhausted beneath hedges or haystacks, or dragged myself painfully through fields or along roads the livelong night? And during the whole winter how much frightful wretchedness do you think has been mine? But no matter. You rich and great ones think little of the sufferings of your fellow creatures."

"This is not altogether true," answered Christina, gently and compassionately. "I can without the imputation of vanity or unmerited self-applause declare that never has either my brother or myself become aware of a case of distress without alleviating it."

"Then give me that gold," cried the woman, sharply, — "that gold which is in your purse! You never knew a case of distress so bitter as mine! Give me the gold, I say, or, by heaven, I will take it from you!"

Christina all in an instant recovered that spirit which was natural to her, and as there was now a look of hardened effrontery and menace in the countenance of the woman, our young heroine was determined not to yield to intimidation.

"I will not give you this gold," she responded. "Take, if you will, the silver that I have proffered you for your immediate necessities, come to Oaklands in the course of the day, convince my brother and myself that you have upon us

the claims you ere now alluded to, and everything shall be done for you."

"I will not come to Oaklands, but I will have that gold!" yelled forth the woman, and the next instant she sprang over the stile.

Christina turned and fled precipitously, for there was all the ferocious wildness of a tiger-cat in the look of that woman. The latter sped in pursuit, and in a few moments she clutched Christina's shoulder. A scream burst from the young lady's lips, but at the same instant some one was seen rushing toward the spot, and Captain Stanley appeared upon the scene. It was now the woman who turned to fly, but Stanley rushed after her. She stopped short and confronted him.

"Dare to touch me," she exclaimed, "and I will tear your face as if with the claws of a wild beast!"

"Sorry am I," answered Captain Stanley, "to be compelled to lay my hands upon a woman, but you shall not escape me thus."

A labouring man now made his appearance at the stile, and on perceiving the altercation, he rushed to the spot.

"Secure this woman!" said Stanley.

The infuriate creature made a bound at the young officer, but she stumbled and fell, and the peasant instantaneously secured her. Resistance on her part was vain, for the man's brawny arms being thrown around her, pinioned her lank arms to her side and held her powerless.

Captain Stanley hastily accosted Christina, and learned from the young lady's lips everything that had passed between herself and the woman. As Stanley listened, an idea flashed to his mind. Who could the woman be but Barbara Smedley? She had for some time been missing. Stanley had read the hand-bills offering a reward for her apprehension; he remembered the description given of her, and despite the change which misery and privation had wrought in the murderess, there was still a sufficient remnant of her former self to justify the belief that she was the identical one who had just been overpowered. Besides, there was no other way of accounting for the words that she had used, to the effect that she had contributed materially to the success and development of the claims of the twins.

"Yes, it must be so," exclaimed Captain Stanley, after

a few moments' reflection. "That woman, Lady Christina, is none other than the wife of a man who gave evidence before the committee of peers, — I mean the convict Smedley."

Our heroine became paler than she was before on hearing this announcement, and she said, "Oh, Captain Stanley, how can I sufficiently thank you for having delivered me from such a wretch?"

"Woman," said the captain, again approaching Barbara, for she indeed it was, "I know who you are. Heaven has decreed that the day of retribution should arrive at last."

"Fool, idiot that I was," screamed forth the wretched creature, "for uttering a word that could betray me! But as well die upon the gallows as perish by starvation! And yet," she continued, now assuming a look and tone of appeal, "you might show mercy upon me, young lady, for if I had not preserved those papers which contained the mystery of your earliest days, neither you nor your brother would perhaps have succeeded — "

"Silence!" exclaimed Stanley, indignantly. "Make no merit of what you did. For purposes of extortion did you keep those papers."

Two or three other labouring men, who were on the way to their work, now made their appearance upon the spot, and as the woman was evidently of the most desperate character, Captain Stanley considered that she could not have too strong an escort. He therefore ordered these men to conduct her to the village, and there consign her into the hands of a constable, so that a justice of the peace might take cognizance of the case in the course of the day. Bab Smedley poured forth a volley of the most terrible imprecations, and Captain Stanley, proffering Christina his arm, hurried the young lady off. This was the second time that he had rendered our heroine a most important service, and she renewed in suitable terms the expression of her gratitude. Was not this an opportunity of which an admirer would take advantage? And Christina looked so eminently beautiful, with the flush of excitement now superseding the paleness of recent terror, that the young officer felt more enamoured of her if possible than ever. She had accepted his arm, but it was natural under the circumstances that she should bestow this degree of confiding

friendship upon him who had delivered her from the violence of a desperate woman. His eyes were fixed admiringly upon her, and yet there was in his gaze all that respectfulness which associates itself with the love of an honourable man for a chaste and virtuous maiden.

"Lady Christina," he said, in a low, gentle, but earnest tone, "will you permit me to offer you the homage of that heart which has learned to appreciate all your excellent qualities? Oh, deem not the moment inopportune, and think not for an instant that I am so ungenerous as to endeavour to avail myself of the little service which has been deemed worthy of your thanks. Let me assure you that from the first instant we ever met in the neighbourhood of London, I have entertained for you the deepest interest, the highest admiration, and permit me now to add the sincerest love. Tell me, Lady Christina, may I venture to hope?"

We have already said that the young maiden was hitherto totally unaware of the sentiment with which she had inspired Robert Stanley. When, therefore, he began to address her in those terms, she was filled with astonishment and confusion; she could not give utterance to a word that might check him at the outset. He felt her hand tremble as it delicately rested upon his arm, and his heart beat with joy at the idea that he was not an object of indifference to her. But when he had ceased speaking, that hand was withdrawn from his arm, and Christina's countenance became deeply serious, at the same time having an expression of pain and regret.

"Captain Stanley," she replied, "I scarcely know in what terms to couch the answer that I am compelled to give you. Believe me, I am not insensible of the flattering compliment conveyed by such a proposal, — but still I cannot accept it."

The young officer was as much astonished as he was grieved. He had not foreseen a refusal, he had not anticipated it. Without any undue vanity, he had believed in the certain success of his suit. The refusal itself was conveyed in language so reserved and ambiguous that it corresponded not with the usual candour of Christina's conduct and disposition. That she was not engaged to another he felt morally certain, for if such engagement existed, why

should it be kept secret? And again, if she loved another without as yet being formally engaged, would she not in her frankness have proclaimed the fact, in order to mitigate the mortification occasioned by this refusal? But to refuse without alleging a reason was an act so different from the idea he had formed of her character that he was astonished at the same time that his manly pride was necessarily wounded.

"Your ladyship will at least pardon me," he said, at last breaking silence, "for having ventured to address you in such terms — "

"I think, Captain Stanley," she interrupted him, "that the way in which I answered you must have sufficiently proven that I felt honoured and flattered by your preference, and therefore I could not be offended. No, believe me, I am not. I feel — I know that I ought to be more explicit, but — "

She stopped short, and the tears began to trickle down her cheeks. She hastily brushed them away, and with a smile of the most amiable ingenuousness, she proffered her hand, saying, "Let us continue friends. You are the friend of my brother, you must be my friend likewise, and I shall never fail to entertain a grateful sense of the services which you have rendered me."

"Yes," said Captain Stanley, "we will be friends," and with an expression of manly frankness upon his countenance, blending likewise with joy, he accepted and warmly pressed the hand which was tendered him.

A conjecture, raised up in his mind by the talismanic touch of hope's creative wand, diffused that joy over his features. He fancied that he had suddenly read the mystery of Christina's conduct. She felt that she did not as yet love him sufficiently to accept his suit, but she already regarded him as a friend; and when she came to know him better, this feeling of friendship might expand into a more tender sentiment. Such was the construction which Robert Stanley put upon her behaviour, and it was natural enough. His pride ceased to be wounded, his sense of mortification was set at rest, his astonishment vanished, and he was enabled at once to begin conversing on general topics with the easy, well-bred familiarity of friendship. On the other hand, Christina thought that her companion was only pur-

suing the course which was proper, manly, and delicate after the refusal he had just experienced, and though she felt deeply for him, yet she was well pleased at the idea that he had made up his mind to endure his disappointment philosophically and courageously.

They returned to the mansion, where the other guests were already assembled, with the young duke, in the breakfast-parlour, and the adventure with Barbara Smedley was related to them. Christian warmly thanked Stanley for the service he had rendered his sister, and the impression left upon the minds of those to whom the incident had just been related was to the effect that accident had taken Stanley in his morning ramble to the spot where his presence was so much needed at the instant. But the reader has doubtless comprehended that the young officer had seen Christina proceed in that particular direction, and he had purposely directed his steps in the same path that he might avail himself of the opportunity to plead his suit.

In the middle of breakfast the letters were brought in by a footman and laid upon the table. There was one for Captain Stanley. He recognized his father's handwriting, and immediately opened it. Joy overspread his countenance, for that epistle conveyed a piece of intelligence which seemed to furnish him with a stronger claim to the hand of Christina than that which, according to his own idea, he could have previously asserted. Sir William Stanley had been raised to the peerage; he was now Lord Vandeleur, and his son was the Honourable Captain Stanley.

On communicating this intelligence, the young officer received the congratulations of all present, and after breakfast he sought an opportunity of speaking alone with the young Duke of Marchmont. They retired together to the library, and the Honourable Captain Stanley then said, "I have taken the earliest opportunity to make you acquainted that something has occurred this morning, and which must not be kept secret from your ears."

Christian looked astonished, and this surprise on his part was indeed most unfeigned.

"To see your sister," continued Stanley, "was to admire her; to know her was to learn to love her. May I hope, my dear friend, that you will not consider me too boldly presumptuous in aspiring to the hand of Lady Christina Vivian?"

"Then you have spoken to my sister on the subject?" asked Christian, quickly.

"I have," replied Stanley.

"And her answer?" said the young duke, with suspense visibly depicted on his countenance.

"Lady Christina has refused me," rejoined the Honourable Captain Stanley, "but not in such terms that forbid me from entertaining a hope. Methinks that I can read Lady Christina's sentiments aright. She will not wed where she does not feel her heart to be thoroughly engaged, and as yet she experiences for me no sentiment fonder than friendship. Have I, my dear friend, your permission to seek to render myself acceptable to your sister? As a man of honour, I considered it expedient to consult you upon the subject with the least possible delay."

Christian reflected deeply and seriously for some moments, and as he thus appeared to hesitate what answer he should give, Stanley's astonishment began to revive, as well as his sense of mortification. After all, was it possible that the character of the twins was different from the estimation he had formed of it? Were they indeed so proud of their newly acquired rank that Lady Christina would only accept the suit of some personage bearing a lofty title? Such was the suspicion which began stealing into Robert Stanley's mind, and his feelings were growing more and more hurt, when Christian suddenly addressed him.

"Before we say another word upon the subject," he exclaimed, "suffer me to have a few minutes' discourse with my sister."

Stanley bowed with a slight degree of coldness, and was about to retire, when the young duke, seizing him by the hand, exclaimed, with an air of much concern, and even of distress, "You must not for an instant suppose that I am hesitating what answer to give you so far as the subject personally regards yourself. Believe me, my dear Stanley, nothing would afford me greater pleasure — oh, yes, a real joy," cried the young duke, enthusiastically, — "nothing, I repeat, would more delight me than that the ties of friendship which already unite us should be strengthened by such an alliance. But — "

"Not another word of explanation, my dear Marchmont," ejaculated Stanley, infinitely relieved by Christian's frank-

ness. " There may be family secrets — And besides, it is natural, it is proper that you should be desirous to consult your sister."

Having thus spoken, Stanley hurried from the room. Christian immediately afterward sought his sister in her boudoir, to which she had retired. He found Christina seated in a pensive mood; indeed, her thoughts were so profoundly absorbed in their topic that she did not hear the door open. It was not until her brother was close by her side that she was aware of his presence. Then, instantaneously assuming a smiling countenance, she welcomed him with her wonted affection.

" My dear sister," said the young duke, " I am come to speak to you on a serious subject."

" I can anticipate it," she answered, " and I should have taken the first opportunity to inform you of what occurred this morning, in addition to the particulars with which you are already acquainted. Captian Stanley honoured me with the offer of his hand — and I refused it."

" You refused it, my dear Christina," said the young duke, placing himself by her side on the sofa where she was seated, taking her hand, and regarding her with the tenderest fraternal love. " You refused — but tell me why, Christina? Give me your confidence, as you have ever given it to me."

" I have no secret, Christian, unknown to you," she replied. " I regard Captain Stanley as a friend, but I do not love him as I feel that one ought to love him who is accepted as a husband. You know everything, my dear Christian, — you know why I do not love Robert Stanley, and why I cannot love him."

Thus speaking, the young maiden threw her arms about her brother's neck, and she reposed her blushing countenance upon his shoulder.

" Tell me, my sweet sister, tell me," he softly asked, " does your mind still cherish an image which, in spite of all your virtue and purity, made its impression there? "

" No, Christian, no," responded his sister, raising her head and meeting his gaze with the steadiness of one conscious that she was speaking the truth, and proudly satisfied with herself that she was enabled to proclaim such a truth. " I have succeeded in triumphing over that weakness, that

criminal folly on my part. I was resolved to exercise all my mental energies, and Heaven assisted me. I prayed fervently — oh, how fervently — for that assistance, and it was vouchsafed. To me Lord Octavian Meredith is now nothing more than one whom I can look upon as a friend."

"Oh, God be thanked for this assurance!" exclaimed Christian, rapturously embracing his sister. "But are you sure, my sweet Christina, that you are not miscalculating the strength of your own mind, that because in the purity of your thoughts you wish it to be strong, you deem that it really is so?"

"Believe me, Christian," she answered, "I am not deceiving myself any more than I am deceiving you. There was a duty to be performed, and it has been accomplished. Oh, my beloved brother, do you not think that the knowledge of our mother's sad, sad history must have been fraught with moral teachings for me? How fatal to her happiness was that love of hers — a love which endured after she became the wife of another! Could I, then, be otherwise than appalled, frightened, and dismayed by the contemplation of that sentiment which I was experiencing for one who is the husband of another? I grappled with it as if it were a serpent which had coiled itself around my heart; I seized it by the throat, I strangled it, I tossed it away from me. Ah! it was a struggle, Christian, and yet it has been accomplished. I feel, I know, in the strength of my own soul can I declare, that were I to meet Lord Octavian Meredith this moment, no change would take place within me; my self-possession would not be outwardly assumed, but inwardly felt."

"Christina," cried her brother, in a tone of exultation, "more welcome to me than a thousand dukedoms is the intelligence which your words have just conveyed. I know that you are incapable of speaking otherwise than with sincerity, and I now know also you sincerely feel all that you have expressed. For weeks and months past I have been anxious to speak to you on this subject, but I have not dared to approach it. I was fearful that by a single word I might revive feelings and memories which in my heart I hoped were becoming subdued and were melting away. Oh, I repeat, my beloved sister, the joy which I now experience is greater than language can express."

"And I, my dear brother," answered the affectionate girl, "am proud as well as happy that I can look you in the face and in the sincerity of my soul give you these assurances. Oh, all the events which came upon us a few months back, with the rapidity of a succession of hurricanes, produced a marvellous effect upon me. I have learned that the soul cannot be strong unless the resolve be previously taken that it shall become strengthened; I have learned to comprehend the maxim that 'Heaven only helps those who help themselves.' Zoe's letters enable me to comprehend that Lord Octavian himself has entered fully into the path of duty; he appreciates all the excellent qualities of his amiable and loving wife, and their happiness is now complete. Could I, even with the slightest remnant of a selfish sentiment, again threaten their felicity? Heaven forbid! If I did not feel how strong in moral purposes I have become, I should be the most unhappy of creatures."

"Then, why not, Christina, accept the addresses of the Honourable Captain Stanley?" asked the young duke.

The maiden shook her head, and replied, "The effort which it has cost me to crush one sentiment in my heart seems to have closed the avenue for the entrance of another. I repeat that I can regard Captain Stanley as a very dear friend, but nothing more. Besides, Christian," added Christina, remorsefully, "even if it were different, even if I felt that I could love Captain Stanley, I would not accept his suit without previously making him acquainted with all that has passed. I would keep no secret from him whom I consented to accompany to the altar."

"There again spoke my pure and noble-minded sister," exclaimed Christian. "You cannot do otherwise than admire the many noble qualities of Robert Stanley. He is intelligent, he is generous-hearted, his character is unimpeachable, his life is immaculate. He possesses rank, and wealth, and personal beauty, though these last considerations, I know, must weigh little with you, my dear sister, in comparison with the former. Although you have so grandly triumphed over one sentiment in your heart, you may not be enabled to comprehend that heart of yours so thoroughly as to arrive at the conclusion that it may never love again. At least you will confess to me that if, in some supposed case, it were your destiny's decree that you should choose a hus-

band from amidst the present circle of your acquaintance, your choice would fall upon Robert Stanley? Yes, you do not deny that it would be so. Let him therefore study to win your affections; let him not depart hence with the idea that there is no hope for him. Tell me, sweet Christina, that it shall be as I now suggest; and if the result should prove in accordance with my expectations, no secret shall be kept from him, all the past shall be candidly confessed, and I have much misread his character if the revelation will alter his sentiments toward you."

Christina reflected profoundly for some few moments, and then she said, her countenance brightening up with the resolve at which she had arrived, " I see, my beloved brother, that you wish me to pursue a particular course, and I will not throw a damp upon your own spirits by refusing compliance. When you entered this room just now, you found me thoughtful. I was giving way to regret, I may even add to remorse, that a sentiment should have ever entered my heart — "

" Of that, dearest sister," interrupted Christian, " we will speak no more. But on the other point, what is your decision? "

" Captain Stanley," replied Christina, " is all manly frankness, and must be dealt with in the same spirit. If a hope must be encouraged in his mind, let him know the whole truth at once. But tell him, Christian, tell him," added the young maiden, " that never did I willingly listen to the language of love from Lord Octavian's lips, that the sense of duty was ever paramount in my mind, and that never for a single instant did he receive encouragement, by look, word, or deed, on my part. And now go to him at once."

The brother again embraced the sister, and he hurried from her boudoir. He sought Captain Stanley; the explanations which he gave were frank and complete. The young officer now comprehended wherefore Christina had refused him without at the time entering into explanations of her own accord and with her own lips; he understood likewise why Christian had himself appeared to hesitate when in the library his assent was asked that he (Stanley) might pay his addresses to his sister.

Every exulting hope was resuscitated in the heart of the young officer, and he warmly expressed his gratitude for

Christian's intervention on his behalf. The young duke was not mistaken in the estimate he had formed of his friend's character and disposition, for Robert Stanley experienced no diminution of his love for Christina after all he had just heard. The young duke returned to his sister, who had remained in her boudoir, and with joy expressed upon his countenance, he exclaimed, "I have now every hope that I shall at no distant time behold you the bride of Robert Stanley."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAIDEN'S BRIDGE

It is a long time since we spoke of the beautiful Isabella Vincent, otherwise than by casual mention of her name. We must now say a few words concerning her proceedings since she inherited the vast domains and riches of the Lascelles family.

The reader cannot have forgotten how eminently she deserved that epithet beautiful which we have just applied to her, or how all worthy she was to become the bride of the youthful wearer of the Marchmont coronet. With a countenance that had exceeding sweetness of expression as well as faultless regularity of features, with the deep blue eyes full of candour and innocence, and shaded by their thickly fringing lashes, with the brilliant transparency of her complexion, and the softest tint of the rose upon her cheeks, and with the rich abundance of the glossy dark brown hair showering in myriad ringlets upon her shoulders, she was indeed a being whom it was bliss to contemplate. When first we introduced her upon the stage of our story, there was a certain soft pensiveness and holy melancholy, so to speak, upon Isabella's countenance, but this expression had now well-nigh passed away, for nought had she to mar her happiness. In a worldly point of view hers was a brilliant position, for she had domains and wealth of her own, and she was about to be allied to one who possessed still larger domains and still greater wealth, and who could place a ducal coronet upon her brow. In the feelings of her own heart she was likewise blessed, for she was to espouse him whom she had so fondly and faithfully loved, and she had the satisfaction of beholding the once obscure Christian Ashton now elevated to one of the loftiest pedestals to

which human ambition could aspire to ascend. Looking back but for a comparatively short space of time, Isabella beheld herself a poor and humble dependent upon her uncle's bounty, inhabiting an obscure lodging, and apparently without a friend in the whole world. Under such circumstances was it that she had first known him who was shortly to lead her to the altar. She had become rich before fortune smiled upon him, and her love had existed the same; not for a single instant had she hesitated to assure the poor and dependent Christian that her chiefest joy in inheriting wealth was that she might be enabled to bestow it all upon him, and thus the deepest gratitude had become blended with the love which he experienced for her. Then when fortune suddenly showered its choicest gifts upon Christian's head, how rejoiced, oh, how unfeignedly rejoiced, was our young hero at his ability to prove that he was deserving of all that love which Isabella had cherished for him! Thus, never had the day fixed for the bridal of any young couple approached under more auspicious circumstances; but before we arrive at the description of that bridal, it is necessary to mention a few incidents of an anterior date.

Isabella was at Ramsgate when the intelligence reached her that the death of her cousin, the young Earl of Lascelles, and of her aunt, the countess, had suddenly put her in possession of all the wealth of the family to which she belonged. She immediately repaired to the mansion at Kensington, and was duly received as its owner. She was thus scarcely seventeen when she inherited that great wealth. The family solicitor, a man of the highest respectability, undertook the conduct of her affairs, and his professional duties were performed with the strictest regard to the best interests of his client. She remained altogether at Kensington until Christian went to Oaklands for the development of the grand but fearful events that were to put him in possession of a dukedom. Then Isabella determined to avail herself of the opportunity to visit her Bloomfield estate, which was situated at a distance of about thirty miles from London. Thither she repaired, and the domestics, together with all the tenantry, were assembled in front of the mansion to receive her. It was already known amongst them that the heiress was young and beautiful, but little had they expected

to behold one so beautiful. She was clad in a mourning garb for those relatives whose death had enriched her, and the sable garments seemed admirably to set off the sylphid symmetry of that tall, slender figure which was so gracile and elegant. But the sweetness and affability of her manner, as she acknowledged the felicitations of her tenants and of her menials, interested them even more than the exquisite beauty of her person, and she was at once endeared to their hearts.

Being already well acquainted with the affairs of the Bloomfield estate, she experienced infinite pleasure in confirming the domestics in their respective situations, and in dealing forth promises amongst the tenants. Improvements were to be effected at her own cost upon their lands, leases about to expire were to be renewed on terms most advantageous to the recipients of these favours, and, in a word, those who had gathered to welcome Miss Vincent's presence had every reason to be satisfied with her demeanour, her conduct, and her language toward them.

On the day after her arrival at Bloomfield the youthful heiress went forth, attended by her steward, to visit those points of interest which belonged to the grounds immediately attached to the mansion. She wished to see the spot where her cousin and her aunt had perished, and likewise the village church where their remains slumbered in the family vault. Although the wintry season was close at hand, yet still the scenery was sufficiently picturesque to interest Isabella, and her imagination could easily supply the charms with which it was invested in the summer. As she proceeded with the steward in the direction of the scene of the tragedy, she conversed with him in respect to its details.

"To tell you the truth, miss," said the steward, "I purposely suppressed some few facts when examined at the coroner's inquest. I did not, however, wilfully tell any falsehoods, but I thought that the family honour would be saved by keeping back some of the truth. And so, as you doubtless read, miss, a verdict of 'Accidental death,' was returned, though there is every reason to believe that the real truth was otherwise."

"And what were those facts which you suppressed?" inquired Isabella, who could not possibly be angry with the

steward for his conduct on the occasion, inasmuch as his motives were purely good.

"I happened, miss, to be the first to discover the tragic event," he replied. "I had some business to transact with Farmer Johnson at his house yonder, — you see it near that windmill, miss, — and I was returning on horseback by the side of the dell. From a height overlooking that abyss I perceived an object that at once struck me as sinister. I sprang from my horse, fastened the bridle to a tree, and descended into the dell. As I with some difficulty crept down the almost precipitous height, I discovered with horror and consternation what the object was, or, rather, I should say what the objects were which had attracted my notice. There, in a shallow part of the stream, their farther progress stopped by stones, or fragments of the height which had fallen down, lay the young earl and the countess. The arms of her ladyship were clasped tightly around his neck; the hands were joined by the interwining fingers as firmly as if they were an iron vise."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Isabella, with a feeling of horror and affright, "what could it have meant? Was it really a double suicide, after all? — for a rumour, you know, to that effect prevailed at the time, until the coroner's inquest set it at rest."

"It must have been a double suicide, miss," answered the steward, "for how else can we account for the fact which I am relating?"

"But suppose," suggested Isabella, "that the countess might have first accidentally fallen into the stream, the earl may have precipitated himself into the water to save her; she in her desperation may have clung to him in the manner in which you found them, and thus they both met with their death."

"It may have been so, miss," responded the steward, "and I sincerely hope it was, for the sake of their souls' repose. It would be better to be enabled to imagine that it was all an accident, rather than wilful self-destruction. At all events, it is certain that it took place from the bridge, which you will presently see."

"And how was that certainty acquired?" asked Isabella.

"Because the countess's kerchief was afterward found in the middle of the bridge, and a piece of her dress was fluttering to

a nail that projected from the side of a plank. The kerchief itself had caught a splinter of an upright post which supported the rail in the middle, and it was just there that the piece of the dress was found fluttering. That therefore was the spot whence the countess had plunged into the foaming tide beneath, but whether accidentally or wilfully is a point which perhaps can never be with certitude cleared up. At all events, miss, I was determined to suppress that fact to which I have already alluded, and which could not have failed to strengthen the suspicion which prevailed at the time that it was a suicide. The two forms were partly out of the water and partly in it, when I found them. The countenance of her ladyship was singularly placid and serene; that of the young earl was expressive of an indescribable horror. It seemed as if having died with that expression upon his features, it remained indelibly stamped there. I separated the arms of the countess from his neck, and I can assure you, miss, it was no easy task, for the fingers were rigid, and they were so firmly interwoven, as it were, that I was compelled to use more violence than one likes to exhibit toward the dead, in order to get them asunder. I laid them side by side on the slope rising from the stream to the foot of the precipitous height, and then I sped for assistance."

By the time this narrative was finished, Isabella and the steward reached the grove through which the path went slightly winding toward the bridge. The grove consisted chiefly of fir-trees, and as these retained their verdure, they formed a screen veiling the bridge until a turn in the path suddenly brought the young lady and the steward in sight of it. The gurgling of the waters in the depth of the abyss met their ears, and Isabella shuddered at the thought that in those depths her relatives had met their doom.

"The bridge has now two rails, you perceive, miss," said the steward, "but at the time when the event took place it only had one. Immediately after the occurrence I ordered another to be fixed up, and the passage of the old bridge is now somewhat safer, though an incautious, a timid, or a tipsy person might still easily slip through."

"Let the building of the new bridge be added to the list of improvements which I suggested yesterday," said Isabella.

"It shall be done, miss," answered the steward, with a respectful bow.

Isabella now entered upon the bridge, and the steward pointed out to her where the handkerchief was found and where the piece of the dress was discovered fluttering. The young lady looked down shudderingly into the depth where the torrent, swollen by recent rains, was eddying and foaming, but she soon raised her eyes, for her brain grew dizzy.

"You perceive, miss," said the steward, indicating the contrary direction, "where the side of the dell rises into that eminence. There is a bridle path along there. It was much farther off from the edge some few years ago, but with the falling-in of the earth it is getting nearer and nearer. It was along that path I was coming when I caught sight of the two bodies — which, however, at first seemed only one object — in the depth below. You may observe where a stunted tree grows sloping out from the precipitous side of that eminence. A few yards on this side of the exact spot which it overhangs lay the corpses, which the force of the torrent had swept thither until the stones arrested their further progress. It is singular," added the steward, with significantly sombre look, "but there is a legend attached to this bridge, and your two relations, miss, formed the second pair who were found in that very spot, the female with her arms clasped tight around the neck of her male companion, and hence the name of the Maiden's Bridge."

"Indeed, this is singular!" said Isabella, a thousand circumstances connected with the deceased Adolphus and Ethel rushing in unto her memory. "I never heard that legend; have the goodness to recite it while we slowly pursue our walk on the other side of this bridge, for my brain feels dizzy while I stand here."

"And by crossing the bridge, miss," rejoined the steward, "you will behold the very cottages with which the legend is likewise associated."

The steward then proceeded to tell the tale which is already known to the reader, and if he did not embellish it with such poetic language as that which Adolphus had used when reciting the tale to Ethel, he nevertheless preserved all the facts, so that Isabella listened with a profound attention. By the time the narrative was finished, they reached the vicinity of the cottages, and the steward re-

marked, "By the bye, miss, I was going to mention to you that a poor shepherd who inhabits one of these dwellings has his wife exceedingly ill. I have done a great deal for the woman; the doctor has attended her, I have sent her all kinds of necessaries, but she seems in a very low way, and it would perhaps cheer her if you would condescend to look in upon her."

"Ah! most willingly shall I perform this duty," said Isabella. "Let us enter the habitation of the invalid."

They entered it accordingly. It was a small cottage, having only two rooms, the inner one of which contained the shepherd's wife. She was a woman of about forty, pale and emaciated with illness; her husband was absent at his work. Their daughter, a girl of twelve or thirteen, was attending upon her invalid mother. The steward remained in the outer room, while Miss Vincent entered that where the invalid occupied a comfortable bed, thanks to the generosity of Isabella's humane intendant.

When Miss Vincent announced herself, the woman was greatly affected by what she conceived the honour thus done her, but the young lady gave her to understand that she regarded it merely as a duty which, as the owner of the estate, she was performing. The invalid was in a low and desponding way, as the steward had already intimated, and it was only with a sickly smile that she expressed her thanks for the assurance made by Isabella that she should not be neglected.

All of a sudden the woman said to her young daughter, "Go into the other room, my dear child; I wish to speak to our kind benefactress alone."

The girl obeyed the mandate, and when the door in the partition closed behind her, the invalid woman, raising herself up in the bed, looked earnestly at Isabella, and said, "I have something, miss, that lies heavy on my mind, something I have longed to tell, but have not dared. As yet only my husband knows it, and he bade me keep silent. But you have spoken such kind words to me, and your looks are so sweet and amiable, that I feel I must tell the secret to you."

"What is it?" asked Isabella, with the awe-inspiring apprehension that she was about to listen to the revelation of a crime.

"I do not know that I have done anything very, very wrong," resumed the woman, "but still I have been afraid, because — "

"Tell me what you have to say," interrupted the young lady, full of anxiety, "and I will candidly give you my opinion upon your conduct, whatever it may have been."

"I am about to speak, miss, of something that happened here, — I mean in the dell — "

"The death of my relations?" interjected Isabella, in feverish suspense.

"Yes, miss," responded the woman. "I never told any one except my husband, but — but — I heard and saw it all."

"You?" said Isabella. "But what did you hear and see? Tell me quickly. No, no, my poor woman. I am wrong thus to excite you. Take your leisure; forgive my impatience."

"This is how it happened, miss. I had been down to the manor on some message from my husband to the steward, and instead of returning by the regular path through the grove, I took a shorter cut to bring me to the bridge. I was within the shade of the trees, but just as I was about to step forth upon the bridge, I caught sight of the young earl and the countess standing together on the very middle of the plank. I thought there was something so affectionate in their manner to each other, as well as in their looks, that I was struck with a suspicion all was not right, and that they were not just upon the terms which a nephew and an aunt — especially as she herself was so young — ought to observe toward each other. Ah, miss, I was seized with woman's curiosity, so I remained hid in the grove to watch and to listen."

"Yes, yes," said Isabella, "I understand. Your fault was venial enough. Proceed."

"Well, miss," continued the woman, "I heard his lordship say that it was in the middle of the bridge where the event of the legend happened, according to the tale afterward told by the young shepherd who witnessed it. And then her ladyship said, — I remember her words as well as possible, — 'Here they fell over, the girl's arms clasped tight around the neck of him who had ruined her happiness.' His lordship answered, 'Yes, it was here,' and then both he and

her ladyship looked over the bridge down into the stream underneath. Oh, miss — "

The woman stopped short, and so strong a convulsive spasm shot through her that the bed shook under her. Horror was in her countenance, and she fixed her eyes with a kindred expression upon Isabella.

" Proceed," said the young lady, catching the infection of the same shuddering horror, for she saw that the mystery of her deceased relatives' fate was about to be fearfully elucidated.

" All of a sudden, miss," continued the invalid woman, in a low and solemn voice, " the countess cried, ' Forgive me, Adolphus! ' Ah, she was thinking of the legend, and she was imitating it frightfully! "

" Good heavens! " murmured Isabella, her blood running cold.

" Yes, she imitated it," proceeded the woman. " She flung her arms around the earl's neck, and down they went together. O God! never shall I forget the wild, wild cry that rang forth from the lips of the young earl. But no cry came from those of the countess. There was an awful splash, and I fell back in a dead swoon in the grove."

" Just Heaven! " murmured Isabella, " what a tragedy. How full of a wild and terrible romance! And now the mystery is cleared up. It was not an accident, it was not even a double suicide; it was a suicide and a murder. How horrible! "

" When I recovered my senses," continued the woman, " I hastened home to the cottage in affright. I felt as if I was going mad; the cry of the earl rang in my ears and seemed to pierce my brain. I told my husband what had happened, and he implored me to keep the thing a secret. He said that we should both be punished for my curiosity by the loss of his situation. So you see, miss, I was afraid to come forward when the coroner's inquest took place, and of course, having kept back then, I have held my tongue ever since. It has preyed upon me, and I do really believe it is this that has made me ill. Several times when I have received kindnesses from your steward, who is a most worthy and excellent man, I have been going to tell him what I saw and heard on that dreadful day, but I have been frightened to do so, I was so afraid he would scold me for

having watched and listened. And then, too, as my husband says, since the coroner's inquest made it all look as if it was an accident, where was the good of giving a worse colour to it before the world? But when you came in just now, miss, and spoke so kind to me, I could not resist the opportunity of telling you, and my mind is relieved. But I hope you are not angry?"

"I am not angry, I have no right to be," interrupted Isabella. "After all, it is fortunate that you have kept the secret, for you have saved the honour of my two relatives."

The woman fully understood Isabella's meaning; she saw that the young lady alluded not merely to the disgrace that would affix itself to the memory of the late countess if it were revealed to the world that by the same act she had rendered herself a murderess and a suicide, but that Miss Vincent's remark likewise pointed to the unquestionable fact that a criminal intimacy must have subsisted between that suicide murderess and her victim.

"I am glad that your mind is easier," continued Isabella, "and I hope that now it is lightened of its load you will soon get well. Do not vex yourself any more upon the subject; keep the seal of silence still upon your lips. You need not even mention to your husband that you have made this revelation to me."

The poor woman thanked Miss Vincent for her kindness, and the young lady took her departure from the cottage, attended by the steward. The latter saw by the countenance of his mistress that something had occurred to horrify and sadden her, but he dared not put a question. The Maiden's Bridge was reached; Isabella traversed it quickly, with but one shuddering look into the foaming, eddying water below, and when the opposite side of the ravine was gained, she said to the steward, in a low voice that was full of a solemn awe, "The mystery exists no longer; it is cleared up. But it was neither an accident nor a double suicide."

She then proceeded to relate all that she had heard from the lips of the invalid peasant woman, and the steward listened with a dismayed interest. Isabella thought that she was bound thus to make him a confidant in respect to the fate of her relatives, after the generosity he had displayed in endeavouring to save the honour of the family name to the utmost of his power.

She proceeded to the village church where the remains of those hapless and guilty lovers lay entombed, and she felt the tears stealing down her cheeks as she thought of the sad and terrible doom they had encountered. Before she departed from Bloomfield, the new bridge was commenced across the ravine, and the invalid peasant woman, surrounded by comforts of every kind, and rapidly recovering her health and strength, had every reason to bless the generosity of Isabella Vincent. The young lady returned to the metropolis, having previously learned by letter a sufficiency of the startling incidents which had occurred at Oaklands to comprehend how important a change had taken place in the circumstances of Christian and Christina. And now some months elapsed, which interval brings us down to the date of the circumstances that occupied the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XX

LAST SCENE WITH THE GERMANS

THE week which was to be passed at Oaklands by the young Duke of Marchmont, his sister, and their guests had expired, and the twins returned to London. The day fixed for the nuptials of our young hero and Isabella was close at hand, but before we come to that point of our story, there is an incident to relate.

It was the day before the one that was to render Christian so supremely happy, and at about two o'clock in the afternoon, when, as he was seated in the drawing-room, a footman entered to announce that the three noblemen who some little while back visited his Grace had called to solicit another audience. The footman, making sure that the Duke of Marchmont would receive them, had already ushered them as far as the outer drawing-room, and he now stood upon the threshold, holding the door half-open.

"Tell those persons," said the young duke, "that I am engaged. I decline to see them."

"Vare goot!" exclaimed the Chevalier Gumbinnen, now pushing past the footman into Christian's presence. "His Grace he sall say be by no means engaged, and his lordship he vell inclined to see his vare goot friends what sall be for loving him so vell."

The lord chamberlain of that high and mighty potentate, the Grand Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha, looked, if possible, more seedy than ever, and brought with him his accustomed odour of raw onions, strong cubas, and intense perspiration. He was followed by the Chevalier Kadger, who kept his right arm most mysteriously held to his side, the real truth being that there was under the armpit a rent which would have looked most unseemly when about the person

of the equerry to a reigning duke; and it would have moreover betrayed a fact that it was just as well to keep concealed, namely, that his Excellency the Chevalier Kadger, wore no shirt. Count Frumpenhausen brought up the rear, and as he had a cold, he was seized with a sneezing fit, which compelled him to blow his nose, but he was particularly cautious to turn around while using his handkerchief, which was a mere dirty remnant of a faded cotton one.

Intense was the Duke of Marchmont's disgust on beholding these three beggarly followers of a beggarly German prince thus insolently force their way into his presence. For the first time, perhaps, since he himself had borne a ducal title, he assumed a hauteur most coldly dignified, and he said to the Chevalier Gumbinnen, "You have wilfully misinterpreted the words I uttered to my domestic. I do not court the acquaintance of either yourself or your companions."

"Ah, vare goot, my lord!" exclaimed the Chevalier Gumbinnen. "Your Grace sall be for doing one vare great favour to dat august duke who you was once de secretare to, and who sall be so graciously pleased for to honour your Grace vid him friendship."

"We sall be for letting your Grace know," Count Frumpenhausen hastened to interject, "dat we come on de special message from his Royal Highness, hein?"

"If that be so," said Christian, "hasten and explain yourselves, for my time is too valuable to be wasted."

"His Royal Highness," resumed the Chevalier Gumbinnen, in his capacity of spokesman, "sall be for to find himself — how you say it?— in der dayvil of a mess. His Royal Highness he sall lose in de voyage by de steamer tree large tronks so full of his clotes dat you sall not be able for to thrust in de pin betwixt dem. Dey all tree sall be tumble overboard in one vare great lurch of de steamer, and all through de vare one great fault of de captain. But dat not all; de worser sall be for to come. De vare large strong-box full of de gelt, and de stars and orders of his Royal Highness, go down in one of dem tronks."

"And what do you require of me?" asked Christian, half-coldly, half-impatiently.

"Himmel!" ejaculated the Chevalier Kadger, shrugging his shoulders, but keeping his right arm fixed as if it were nailed to his side.

"His Royal Highness," continued Gumbinnen, "not choose for to tell his vare goot brudder, de Prince Albert, of all dese mishaps, and derefore his Royal Highness sall be for honouring his vare goot friend de Duke of Marchmont by asking for de loan of a tousand guineas and de address of his Grace's tailor. Himmel, my lord, dat is de whole fact. Kadger sall be for to prove it — "

"And Count Frumpenhausen to swear to it," added our hero, ironically.

"Begar! You doubt us, my lord?" exclaimed the Chevalier Gumbinnen. "Come, den, and see his Royal Highness, and you sall be for learning dat it all de fact. We was for saying to his Royal Highness dat we had seen de yong duke de oder day, dat he receive us so kind, and dat he ask us to come anoder day and take de lonch wit him. So den his Royal Highness he sall say, 'Vare goot. Go to mine yong friends; tell him what for I sall be wanting his assistance, and how he sall be for sending me de tousand guineas and de name of his tailor,' hein?"

"Listen, gentlemen," said our young hero. "The tale you have just told me about the loss of the trunks is one which carries deception on the face of it. Your grand duke is as contemptible as yourselves, particularly in respect to the mode by which he seeks to replenish his purse. Unfortunately for the British people, he is really a German grand duke, and we all know it to our cost, for he never visits England without having his expenses paid from our national treasury."

Here the Chevalier Gumbinnen thought it becoming, as the grand duke's representative, to assume the indignant, and with a loudly ejaculated "Begar!" he advanced so close up to Christian, in order to give effect to the words he was about to utter, that the strong odour which he carried about him was most sickeningly overpowering. The young duke hastened to the window and threw it up. Just at that very moment a Punch and Judy show was passing in the square, and it halted immediately under the window. Then there arose a sound of the big drum and the Pandæan pipes (vulgarly called a mouth-organ). The young duke tossed out half a crown, at the same time waving his hand for the itinerants to depart, when it struck him that he struck him that he recognized the lean, gaunt form, as well

as the pinched, hungry countenance, of the individual who was making that music. A second glance convinced his Grace that he was right. Yes, there, with the mouth-organ tucked into his neckcloth, and the huge drum suspended by a cord over his shoulders, looked most excruciatingly unhappy, but still the most ludicrous picture of misery that can possibly be conceived, stood that once eminent and distinguished man, Baron Raggidbak!

"There!" exclaimed Christian, "there is one of your late friends, — a person who I have no doubt is in every way as deserving of a title, or of a prison for vagabondage, no matter which, as yourselves."

The Chevalier Gumbinnen, the Chevalier Kadger, and Count Frumpenhausen rushed to the window, and thence they beheld the discarded groom of the stole, Baron Raggidbak. The baron himself, having his eyes turned upward while running his lips along the reeds of the mouth-organ, caught sight of his three acquaintances, and a malignant expression appeared on his previously rueful countenance. Then, too, he recognized in the young Duke of Marchmont the late secretary of his Highness the Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha, and some person amongst the crowd that was collecting around the Punch and Judy show exclaimed, "There! that's the young duke! That's the handsome young gentleman who a few months back inherited the Marchmont peerage!"

"Mine Gott!" muttered Raggidbak to himself, "de yong mans sall now go for to be a duke!" Then raising his voice, he shouted out, "Come down, you damn rascals! What for you in de palace of one great duke? Him an Inglis duke! you de shabby, beggarly flonkies of de one great pauper German duke! Ah, you go tell him Royal Highness dat me get dronk and me sell de plate off de harness! Oh, you vare great damn rascals!"

While Baron Raggidbak was thus relieving his mind of its spiteful and vindictive feelings toward the three officials of the puissant German prince, those individuals themselves stood transfixed in astonishment and dismay at the window. When he had finished his ejaculatory objurgations, Baron Raggidbak wound all up with a wild flourish upon the mouth-organ, and such a terrific blow upon the big drum that the parchment was cracked. The individual whose

duty it was to stand in front of the show and carry on a pleasant discourse with Mr. Punch was so incensed at this wanton destruction of property that he seized upon the cudgel with which Punch was wont to inflict personal chastisement upon Judy, and he aimed a terrific blow at the sconce of Baron Raggidbak. But this illustrious personage, who now seemed inspired with a new life of some kind or another, dexterously warded off the blow, seized upon the staff, and therewith struck the Punch and Judy man to the ground, thus in a moment avenging many an insult, cuff, gibe, and practical joke which he had previously submitted to with a sullen and morose resignation. Then tossing away the mouth-organ, slipping the drum off his neck, and giving it a terrific kick which smashed in the hitherto uninjured side, he darted away as fast as his legs could carry him.

All this was the work of a very few moments, and the crowd, hugely delighted at the whole scene, cheered most lustily.

"Now," said Christian, abruptly closing the window, and addressing himself in a peremptory manner to his three German visitors, "I order you to retire; and I have further to inform you that if you again present yourselves at my residence, you will find the doors closed against you."

"Begar!" exclaimed the Chevalier Kadger, gesticulating violently, so that forgetting any longer to hold his arm tight to his side, he displayed the rent which he had hitherto so studiously concealed; "dis vare great insult sall be for to have satisfaction. Dis sall be mine friend," and he pointed to the Chevalier Gumbinnen. "Me fight mit de broadsword, and me pink you troo and troo — himmel!"

"Vare goot!" ejaculated Count Frumpenhausen, displaying his tattered kerchief, he being seized with a violent sneezing fit at the moment, "Dis sall be one duel, or you, my lord, sall be for making de apology, which, begar! sall be for de best; and you sall be for ordering de bottles of wine, de port and sherries, so we sall all make it up and be vare goot friends. It not de first time, my lord, you find us vare goot gumpany."

The young Duke of Marchmont rang the bell violently, and when a footman answered the summons, he exclaimed, "Show these persons from the house, and tell the hall

porter to take care that they never again cross my threshold."

Nothing could exceed the rage of the three Germans on hearing this mandate issued. The Chevalier Gumbinnen thrust his hands into his hair, and tore at it violently, as if he were madly intent on tearing out masses by the roots, and then, with a loud "Begar!" he rushed toward Christian to deal him a blow. But the footman sprang forward, at the same time shouting for help, and seizing the Chevalier Gumbinnen by the coat collar at the back part of the neck, he forced him from the room. Two other tall, powerful footmen instantaneously made their appearance; they laid hands upon the Chevalier Kadger and Count Frumpenhausen in a similar manner, and ejected them in the same style. When once out of their ducal master's sight, the three footman gave free vent to their antipathies against the Germans, and from the top of the stairs to the bottom it was a series of kicks respectively administered to the hinderquarters of those three retainers of the high and mighty prince, the Grand Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha. Through the spacious hall were the miserable Germans thus ignominously urged along, until they were finally expelled, each with a good parting kick, from the portals of the mansion, the whole scene being to the infinite amusement of the domestics who administered the chastisement, as well as of the others who were lounging in the hall at the time.

Now, the usage which the three Germans thus experienced was certainly somewhat of the roughest, and the consequences were displayed in the condition of their apparel as they made their forced and ignominious exit from the ducal mansion. The Chevalier Gumbinnen had the seat of his pantaloons most uncomfortably rent, and as his coat was very short, the damage was plainly visible. Furthermore, as he wore no shirt, the incident was fraught with a still greater inconvenience, for something more than a glimpse of the filthiest pair of drawers was afforded. The Chevalier Kadger had the rent under the armpit most cruelly magnified, and his independence of linen, calico, or long-cloth, in the shape of shirting, was likewise apparent. As for Count Frumpenhausen, who wore a great loose coat, very much in the shape of a blouse, its strong, coarse material had

withstood the violence of the treatment he experienced, but his dirty rag of a handkerchief was hanging for more than three parts of its length out of his pockets. Thus, three more ignominiously comical figures it would be impossible to conceive, and to enhance their mortification, they all in a moment found themselves in the midst of the crowd which had assembled about the Punch and Judy show.

"My eyes, Bill, here's a rum go!" exclaimed a coal-heaver to a comrade also wearing a hat with a long flap down the back.

"What a lark!" yelled an urchin with an iron hoop in his hand, and in a moment the three flying Germans were assailed with all sorts of gibes, taunts, and jests.

Away they sped, and away rushed all the small boys of the crowd after them. The ranks of the pursuers were quickly recruited by other idle urchins in the thoroughfares through which the strange procession passed, and the quicker went the maddened Germans, the quicker likewise became the pace of the crowd that was hooting, yelling, shouting, and laughing at their heels.

In the meanwhile a certain high functionary connected with the British court, but whose name and precise office it suits our purpose to suppress, was paying a private visit upon particular business to the Grand Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha at Mivart's Hotel. His Royal Highness, the illustrious reigning prince, was clad in a very shabby uniform, but this might be accounted for by the fact that his three trunks, full of magnificent clothing, had gone down to the bottom of the sea, — at least so the Chevalier Gumbinnen had said, and who would venture to doubt the word of such an eminent personage? His Royal Highness was seated at a table with his hands, and we fear nothing else, in his pockets, while the high functionary of the British court was seated near the duke, with a paper containing several memoranda before him. A portion of the conversation that was taking place may not be uninteresting to our readers.

"I am sure your Royal Highness will excuse me," said the court official, with the most urbane deference of look, tone, and manner; "I am but conveying the sentiments of your august brother — "

"I know it, my lord, I know it," interjected the grand duke, who, as the reader will recollect, spoke English toler-

ably well. "But my brother the prince must recollect that he is in a very flourishing condition. What would he have been but for his marriage?"

"True, your Royal Highness," said the court official. "But here" — referring to the paper before him — "we have about six thousand pounds transmitted to your Royal Highness in the course of only eight or nine months. The first thousand —"

"I have already explained to your lordship," answered the grand duke, "that it was expended in putting a slate roof upon my palace instead of the wretched old thatch that for years had been rotting there."

"But this second thousand?" said the court official inquiringly.

"Why, you know, my lord," responded the grand duke, "that this sum went for a very delicate purpose, the redemption of my plate, — you know what I mean. If I might indulge in a pleasantry, I think it is what you English would call its release from the guardianship of an uncle."

The reigning grand duke indulged in a loud "Ha! ha! ha!" And so the court official, a parasite even to a pauper, so long as this pauper was a royal one, considered himself compelled to echo it distantly with a tittering "He! he! he!"

"Well, your Royal Highness," he said, "we will not go into any further details relative to past money matters, but your august brother the prince ventures through me to suggest that your Royal Highness might surround yourself with a better class of followers —"

"Indeed!" interrupted the grand duke, haughtily, "I should advise my august brother to keep such counsel to himself. When he was in Germany, before he contracted his marriage, he was intimate with Gumbinnen, smoked cigars with Kadger, drank beer with Frumpenhausen, and delighted in a dish of sour-crout with Wronki. They are all very good fellows in their way, well-conducted and respectable. They have just gone to a grand entertainment at the young Duke of Marchmont's. But, ah, what is this noise?"

"Some street disturbance, no doubt," said the court official.

The grand duke and his visitor hastened to the window,

and heavens! what a spectacle met their view! There were those good fellows, those respectable and well-conducted men, rushing like escaped lunatics along the streets, the garments of the two chevaliers displaying most unseemly rents, and Frumpenhausen's ragged kerchief trailing like a tail behind him. And then came about two hundred urchins and ragamuffins of every description, yelling, shouting, hooting, and giving vent to their exuberant mirth in terms but little complimentary to the high functionaries belonging to the court of the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha. His Royal Highness was aghast, his lordly visitor was horrified. Into the hotel rushed the three Germans, while half a dozen policemen, armed with their bludgeons, darted in amongst the crowd with the intention of dispersing it. This was at length done, and then the court official, looking significantly at the reigning duke, said, "Now, your Royal Highness must really pardon me for observing that your followers disgrace you."

"I will have justice, my lord," exclaimed the grand duke, terrifically irate. "I insist that all the persons concerned in this scandalous treatment of my followers be ordered to leave London within twenty-four hours, and England within three days, on pain of being shut up in the Tower for the rest of their lives."

"Your Royal Highness forgets," answered the court official, "that this is not Germany."

"Then the sooner it is made like Germany the better," exclaimed the infuriate duke. "I am sure my brother is trying hard enough — "

"No doubt, your Royal Highness," rejoined the official, "and we are certainly making progress in that desirable direction. But still things cannot be done in this country on a sudden. We have a constitution — "

"And what the devil do you want with a constitution?" exclaimed the grand duke. "Do as we do in Germany: keep a constitution as a sop to throw to the people when irritated, and then take it away again when the public mind has calmed down."

"The plan is certainly a good one, your Royal Highness," answered the lordly sycophant, "but unfortunately, in this country, we have a Parliament, we have laws — "

"Trash! rubbish!" ejaculated the grand duke, with a

disgust that certainly was most unfeigned. "Get rid of them; do as we do in Germany, ride roughshod over them. Ah! it is fortunate for you English people that I condescend to visit your shores now and then, for if it were not for the advice I give to my dear brother, I am sure I do not know what would become of you all. And yet he grumbles b cause I require a little money!"

At this moment the door burst open, and a tall, gaunt form strode in, with the spindleshanks clothed in a strange pair of inexpressibles. This was the Baron Raggidbak, and the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha assumed his haughtiest demeanour on beholding the discharged and disgraced functionary.

"I want my rights!" exclaimed Raggidbak, striking his fist forcibly upon the table up to which he had advanced. "Dey say me get dronk, and me no get dronk. Me only too damn glad to be for seeing anything at Quotha to get dronk upon. Nothing but small beer — damn small beer! Den dey sall say me steal de plate off de harness. De plate not worth de stealing. And why for your Royal Highness not pay my wage regular? De Ponch and Judy showman he pay my wage regular, but de grand duke he never have not one farden. Dat all de difference. I want my rights —"

"Begone!" exclaimed the grand duke; "begone, I say, or you shall be locked up in a fortress for the remainder of your life."

"Ah! dat all vare goot in faderland," exclaimed Raggidbak, maliciously, "but dat no goot in dis contry. Your Royal Highness sall be for making me one excuse — or how you call it? — one apology, and you sall be for taking me back into your service, mit de pledge dat you sall not be for ill-treating me when we get back to faderland."

"Now, my good fellow," said the court official, who had no recollection of Baron Raggidbak, "you had better take yourself off, or I shall call a constable and give you into his custody."

Baron Raggidbak began to curse and swear both in English and in German; he rent his hair, he stamped and stormed, and he vowed that he would expose the characters of all the grand duke's officials, as well as their real position and standing in their native land, unless his Royal Highness should consent to do him justice. All these threats he

uttered in English, which indeed, apart from the interjected German imprecations, was the language that he had spoken from the outset, for the express behoof of the British court official whom he found with his Royal Highness. The unfortunate baron proceeded to create such a tremendous disturbance that it was deemed necessary to send for a police officer. He was then most ignominiously given into custody, but it was not thought expedient to convey him into the presence of a magistrate, on account of the threatened revelations. The miserable baron was therefore dragged to the office of the home secretary, where, after a brief examination, a warrant was made out for his committal to Bethlem, " as a rabid and dangerous lunatic who had dealt in menaces against the august person of the reigning Duke of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha."

A highly coloured account appeared in the daily journals, accompanied by many comments upon " the state of mind of the unfortunate nobleman, who had once filled a distinguished post at the court of his Royal Highness, but from which he had been dismissed for malversation to the extent of some hundreds of thousands of pounds."

Had those journals been honest, they would have used the word " peculation," and if they had been truthful, they would have represented the amount of the larceny at the value of about eighteenpence. But their great aim was to impress the public mind with the grandeur, pomp, and riches which prevailed at the ducal court of Maxe-Stolburg-Quotha.

On the following day the Chevalier Gumbinnen, the Chevalier Kadger, and Count Frumpenhausen appeared each in a bran new suit of clothes, purchased ready-made and privately of Moses & Son, and they received a warning from their ducal master to abstain thenceforth from the habit of eating raw onions, smoking bad cubas, and going without shirts when on a visit to this country, especially to avoid getting into rows, with full permission to relapse into their old ways on their return to their own beloved faderland.

CHAPTER XXI

THE JUNGLE

The scene changes to a far distant country. In a cloudless sky the noonday sun was set like a huge ball of fire, its torrid beams pouring down with a sultriness from which it would almost appear that every living thing would shrink to the nearest shade. Not a breath of air fanned the leaves; motionless they hung, as if all artificial, with stems of iron wires. Upon the pools there was not the slightest ruffle; the streams flowed so languidly that they seemed to be of quicksilver, a fluid too heavy to permit the slightest agitation upon the surface. All was likewise silent, as if the scene which we are describing was utterly untenanted by a living thing.

It was one vast wilderness of verdure, broken only by the places where the pools existed or the streams were sluggishly and almost imperceptibly gliding. Masses of underwood were interspersed with trees, in many spots appearing singly, in others forming small groups, in others again, congregating into the extent of woods, but in the distance so thickly aggregated as to expand into the magnificence of forests. Though the atmosphere was so clear and so fully illuminated with the golden effulgence of the sun, yet was it not merely heavy with its intense sultriness, but in its stagnation there was a sense of noisomeness and disease. To breathe it was fraught with a profound oppressiveness; it seemed impossible that the lungs could become expanded with such inhalation. Breathing itself was gasping. There was no vitality in that air; it afforded not the sense of active vigorous life.

All was silent, and no evidence of the existence of any living thing met the eye of the observer, if an observer

there were. And yet how different was the case! Within the dense shade of the underwood wild beasts were lazily reposing, rendered languid almost to torpor by the stifling heat. Within the cup of the wild flower some venomous little reptile was coiled up, the cobra was concealed in the grass, and what seemed to be an uncouthly swollen part of the branch of some tall tree was in reality the boa-constrictor twisted and twined around into a loathsome, slimy knot.

And there was an observer amidst that scene. By the side of a pool a man was seated, bathing his feet, yet half-afraid to dip them into the still water for fear lest some monster should thrust up its huge head to seize upon his limbs. Parched with thirst, he drank and drank again, and yet the water refreshed him not, for it was tepid, it was warm to sickliness.

Profoundly unhappy seemed that man, and yet his was a countenance that could scarcely express anything beyond the ferocity and devilish wickedness which belonged to his character. His garments, of a European fashion, were travel-soiled; and as the man sat by that pool, he ever and anon looked around him, as if in utter consternation and dismay when the sense smote him of the stupendous loneliness and utter helplessness of his position.

Presently that dense silence was broken by the sound of something rustling in the brake on the opposite side of the pool, and the object, whatever it were, plunged into the water, which rippled sluggishly and became still and smooth again. With what awful terror did that man spring up to his feet! How literally did his hair stand on end! What intense anguish, what excruciating suspense, what ineffable dread were depicted upon his countenance! An observer, if there had been one, might have forgotten his abhorrent ugliness in the sense of compassion which would have been felt for a being who evidently suffered such dire horror. And no wonder that he should so suffer, for when that sound broke thus suddenly upon his startled ear, a thousand crucifying apprehensions swept through his brain. Was it a huge serpent about to fling out its hideous length at him and encircle him in its slimy, horrible, deadly folds? or was it a tiger springing at him? or was it some other monster belonging to that scene in the midst of which he found him-

self thus lonely, thus friendless, thus unprotected and forlorn? The scene itself was in India, the place was a jungle, and that man was the Burker.

He had escaped from Inderabad, but now how bitterly did he curse himself for having taken that step! At least a hundred miles lay betwixt him and the capital of Queen Indora's kingdom; he might possibly retrace his way, he might go back to his fortress, but he dared not; for in order to effect his flight he had slain the sentinel who guarded the passage from which his cell opened, and he could not entertain the hope that Queen Indora or her royal husband would so far overlook the crime as to leave him in possession of his life.

Yet, on the other hand, of what value was that life amidst the horrors of this jungle? He knew not where to place himself in order to be in safety. If he sat beneath the shade of a tree, the hideous idea would creep over him that a huge snake might at any instant dart down with its tremendous length and wind its loathsome coils around him. If he sought the groves, he dreaded lest the silence should suddenly be broken by the howl of a wild beast and its claws should be struck deep into his palpitating flesh. If he made his way through the underwood, he felt every instant as if the deadly cobra were winding around his legs. If he rested himself upon the grass by the side of a stream or pool, his blood still curdled with the apprehension that some insidious reptile was gliding through the rank luxuriance of that herbage toward him. This man lived an entire age of horrors in every passing minute.

At an early hour in the morning of that day he had passed through a little village where some bullock-drivers, cooking their rice in the public khan, had from charity given him a portion of their food. Thence journeying onward, he had insensibly plunged deeper and deeper into this wild scene of fearful beauty, which, when too late to retreat, he discovered to be a jungle swarming with the brute and reptile enemies of man.

It were vain for the Burker to ask himself what he should do; his imagination could suggest nothing, unless now and then he reflected that it were better to attempt to make his way back to Inderabad, and dare whatever fate might attend him there, than wander about in this abject wretchedness

of mind to perish by the venom of a serpent, in the coils of a snake, or by the fangs and claws of a wild beast. And this reflection again occurred to the Burker after that startling incident which had filled him with such horrible apprehension by the side of the stagnant pool.

Yes, his resolve was now taken, and he began to retrace his way, as well as he could recollect it, toward the direction from which he had come. He thought that if he could only regain the village where he had received the alms of rice in the morning, he might thence trace his road back to Inderabad. But pathway in the jungle there was none, and in a very little time the Burker found that he was completely at fault concerning the direction which he ought to pursue. There certainly was a group of trees which he did not remember to have noticed before, there was a pool by which he assuredly had not passed, and there again was the ruin of some ancient temple that seemed to indicate a spot unmarked by him before. Again he sat down in a place which he fancied to be the most secure from any sudden attack on the part of reptile or wild beast, and again did he abandon himself to blank despair. It was a small, open spot, denuded of verdure, with underwood at a little distance, and a clump of trees rising in the midst about forty yards off. His eyes were riveted upon those trees, because he now sat motionless, and the gaze of one in such a state of mind is wont to fix itself upon something. Yes, utterly motionless he sat, his elbows upon his knees, his hands supporting his countenance. Slowly through his mind rolled all the incidents of his life, a hideous phantasmagoria, a horrible panorama, and the wretch was appalled by the scenes that memory thus in succession conjured up. What would he give to be enabled to live his entire life over again! And yet it was not precisely remorse, but only regret which the man felt; not remorse for the crimes themselves, but regret that he should have committed them, inasmuch as his present position was one of their consequences. He cursed himself as a fool, rather than loathed himself as a criminal.

His gaze was fixed upon the clump of trees, at first vacantly, until at length something began to attract his attention. It seemed as if one long stem was in motion while the others were stationary. He strained his regards.

No, it must be an illusion, all those stems were utterly still; for how could they possibly be agitated when there was not a breath of air to ruffle the smallest of the leaves that belonged to their crowning foliage? And yet the Burker felt as if his gaze were irresistibly retained there by some unknown fascination. Ah! again the stem of that tree appeared to move. Yes, and now the branches themselves were shaken! The next instant all was still. The Burker sat stupefied by a vague sense of terror, his eyes riveted upon that stem. Though the ardent sun was bathing him, as it were, in its molten effulgence, yet was he now shuddering with a glacial chill, while the big drops burst out cold and clammy upon him. Oh, what a convulsing horror shook him with the strongest spasm as he suddenly beheld that seeming stem draw itself up from the ground and disappear amidst the foliage! Then among the branches and leaves of all those trees there was a rapid rushing, a vivid playing hither and thither, a continuous succession of bounds and leaps and springs, which shook tree after tree, and the Burker now knew it was the hideous frolicking of a snake amidst that foliage!

He started up to his feet; he endeavoured to move, but overpowering horror riveted him to the spot. His lower limbs seemed turned into stone; they were as heavy as lead, just as they often appear to the dreamer in the midst of a terrific nightmare. Colder and more clammy still stood the perspiration upon him; he was literally bathed in his own agony.

All of a sudden something darted forth from the canopy of verdure; it was the terrible boa-constrictor flinging its immense supple length out from amongst the interlacing branches and masses of foliage that had just proved the scene of its fearful gambolings. It was seen by the Burker but for a moment; it disappeared amongst the underwood, and then there was a rushing noise toward the spot where he stood like an effigy of marble, but with all the keenest sensibility of a man. Yet for not more than another instant did he stand thus as if petrified; down he fell, as if terror itself had become suddenly personified in some huge giant shape, and with an invisible foot crushed him to the earth. The wretch writhed upon the soil as if already encircled by the folds of the monstrous snake of which he had caught a

glimpse as it flung itself from amidst the trees. Indeed so strong was his imagination that his contortions and convulsions were as agonizing and his throes as horrible as if the serpent had verily and positively got him in its folds. Though all this endured but for a few instants, it was a perfect century of excruciations, and yet no cry escaped his lips, the power of utterance was paralyzed, and his agony was perhaps all the greater because he could not give vent to it in one long, loud, pealing cry.

But it was merely in imagination that he was thus suffering. On came the hideous rush that made his blood curdle within him and a glacial chill sweep down his very backbone. But the rush swept past him at a little distance, still amidst the underwood, and then there was a heavy splash in some water that had remained concealed from his eyes. He sprang up to his feet, he rushed away from the spot, but on a little eminence he for a moment reverted his gaze as if by an irresistible fascination. Thence he caught a glimpse of the pool into which the monstrous reptile had plunged, and he beheld its whole length darting through the water, just underneath the surface, and with its head above it. Away sped the Burker; for a long time he ran, experiencing the awful horror which the spectacle had left upon his mind, as well as the dread that the reptile would yet pursue him and make him its prey.

When thoroughly exhausted, and now with a burning perspiration upon him, he threw himself upon some grass. A loud hissing immediately fell upon his ear; he sprang up as if galvanized, and he caught a glimpse of a cobra gliding away at a little distance. Away he started again; the wretch's brain was almost turned with indescribable horror. At length he beheld what appeared like a rocky elevation, not more than thirty feet high at its greatest altitude, and thither he bent his steps. It proved to be what it appeared, and the Burker found that it contained a cave, without any herbage in its immediate vicinity, so that he walked with a mind relieved from the dread of having his ankle suddenly encircled by some venomous reptile. Yet he was cautious in entering the cave, for fear lest it should be the lair of a wild beast.

It did not penetrate far into the rock, and thus the Burker was soon satisfied that no brute enemy was to be encountered

there. There was a sort of loophole fashioned on one side of the cave to admit the light to its innermost depth, and to his mingled joy and surprise he found a mass of cold boiled rice and some fruits placed in a niche underneath the loophole. It naturally struck him that chance had brought him to the habitation of some anchorite dweller in that jungle, and he sat down in the cave to await the return of its supposed proprietor. But an hour passed, and no one made his appearance. Then the Burker, feeling the pressure of hunger, began to make free with the provisions, to which, indeed, he was truly welcome, for according to a custom prevalent in India, they had been left by some benevolent gossoon, or wandering dervish, for the benefit of the next wayfarer through that wild, uninhabited region. But this fact the Burker did not know, and could not then surmise; and thus hour after hour did he wait in the hope of seeing a human form make its appearance, for he craved any companionship in the awful solitude of that jungle.

No one however came, and night was now approaching. There was an ample supply of food for the morrow, for the Burker had eaten sparingly, for fear of giving offence to the supposed anchorite owner of the cavern. The cave was cool during the daytime, in comparison with the intense sultriness that prevailed where he was exposed to the rays of the burning sun, and it seemed to afford a secure resting-place for the night. But haunted by the dread of reptiles and wild beasts, the Burker looked about for the means of rendering it as safe as possible. He blocked up the loophole with stones and fragments of rock, and carrying other fragments into the cave, he formed a barricade sufficiently high at the entrance to protect himself against the intrusion of the enemies he so much dreaded. Then he stretched himself upon the ground to sleep, and thoroughly exhausted, he soon fell into slumber. But his repose was rendered uneasy and agitated by terrific dreams, in which the adventures with the huge boa-constrictor and the hissing cobra were enacted all over again.

He awoke in the morning, but little refreshed by his slumber, shuddering with the recollections of the dreams that had haunted him, and scarcely able to persuade himself for a considerable time that he was not exposed to some imminent peril of a fearful nature. When his mind was

somewhat collected, he removed the barricade from the mouth of the cavern; he walked forth, and he looked around him in the hope of discerning the supposed owner of the place where he had found a lodging. But still no human form met his eye, and returning into the cave he refreshed himself with a portion of the provisions. The fruits cooled his parched tongue, and as he ate, he still marvelled why the supposed owner of the cave should remain absent. At length he began to fancy that he might possibly have died in the jungle, somewhere in the neighbourhood, or that he had become the prey of a wild beast or a reptile. All his horrible apprehensions in respect to those dreaded creatures returned to the Burker's mind, and he ventured not far away from the vicinage of the cave throughout that day. At the back of the rock a spring trickled down, and though unprotected by shade, yet was the water cooler than any which the Burker had tasted elsewhere since his entrance into the jungle. When night came, he barricaded the entrance to the cave again, and he slept, but his slumber was once more haunted by horrible dreams, in which tigers, snakes, and venomous reptiles played a conspicuous part.

When morning returned, the Burker made an end of the provisions which he had found in the cave, and he perceived the necessity of seeking somewhere for a fresh supply, as no living being made his appearance, and he was more than ever convinced that the anchorite owner of that dwelling must have perished in the jungle. He now wandered farther away from the cavern than on the preceding day he had ventured to do, and he endeavoured to find the route to that village which has been before alluded to. He strove to recollect any particular landmarks that might guide him in his search, but herein he totally failed, and he was floundering farther and farther into the jungle instead of drawing nearer to the accomplishment of his aim. He had, however, been careful to note the landmarks which might guide him back to the hospitable cavern, and toward evening he began to retrace his way thither, half-famished and with something very much like a prospect of starvation before him.

He had to pass an assemblage of trees, constituting a dense grove, and occupying about a couple of acres of ground. As he drew near this grove, the Burker fancied that he heard the sounds of human voices. He stopped and listened. Yes,

assuredly his conjecture was right! But who might the individuals be? In a country where the members of the brute creation were of so formidable, fearful, and hideous a nature, some of the human species itself might be dangerous to fall in with. So thought the Burker, and he therefore resolved to proceed with caution before presenting himself to these travellers, whoever they might be. The irregularities of the grove, the trees of which stretched out at one point and retreated inwards at another, favoured his stealthy design, so that the Burker was enabled to find a hiding-place, whence he himself might reconnoitre without being seen.

He now beheld two natives, seated upon a spot where only the short grass grew, and the smouldering embers of a fire showed that they had recently been cooking the provisions which they were now eating. These consisted of rice and vegetables, but ever and anon one of the Hindus took a sort of gourd, which was slung by a leathern belt over his shoulder, and having applied it to his own lips, he passed it to his companion. The latter, instead of a gourd, had a sort of knapsack slung over his own shoulder, and both were men between thirty and forty years of age, attired in a manner that showed they belonged to a humble class. Each, however, had pistols in his belt, and each a musket, or rifle, lying by his side. They had no horses; they were evidently travelling upon foot, and they had curiously contrived leathern leggings reaching nearly up to the middle of their thighs, no doubt to protect their lower limbs from the fangs of venomous reptiles while making their way through the jungle. They seemed happy and contented enough, as if reposing in that shade with a perfect sense of security, so that the Burker wondered how they could feel themselves thus safe against the sudden attack of a boa-constrictor from a tree, however great their reliance might be on their firearms in case of the appearance of a wild beast.

The Burker, encouraged by their evident good-humour, was about to issue forth from his place of concealment and accost the two natives, to whom he intended by signs to make known that he was hungry, when a spectacle which he beheld retained him still in his hiding-place. It must be understood that this hiding-place was amongst a number of trees jutting forth, as it were, from the side of the grove

itself, and therefore half-enclosing the open space where the two natives were reposing and feasting. They themselves were lying in such a way that their backs were toward the grove and their sides toward the Burker. It was just at the very moment when the Burker was about to issue forth and reveal himself, that he beheld some dark object, just within the trees and thick underwood behind the two natives. The next instant the branch of a tree was put aside, and the dark countenance of a man peered forth upon the two travellers. This movement was evidently executed in so stealthly and noiseless a manner that the travellers themselves remained unsuspicious of it, for no doubt if they had heard even so much as the rustling of a leaf they would have grasped their rifles and started up to their feet. The Burker knew not what it meant, but a vague terror seized upon him, for he fancied that some mischief was intended, and he remained motionless as a statue in his hiding-place. But his eyes were riveted upon the spot where that dark countenance had appeared. Again the branch was put aside in the same noiseless manner as before, and now the Burker beheld two swarthy countenances looking down upon the travellers. He was near enough to observe the sinister glare of the eyes belonging to those two countenances, and a still deeper terror was stricken into his own heart.

If all this had occurred in his own native land, the Burker would have doubtless taken some decisive part, but here, in this horrible jungle, it was quite different. Indeed, his mind was attenuated by the sense of continuous perils which surrounded him, by the objects he had seen, and by his horrible dreams at night; he was in a strange land, where everything was different from what he had been accustomed to in England, and thus was it that the Burker in an Indian jungle was himself a different being from the Burker in his own country.

There he was, motionless in his hiding-place, his mind full of a dismayed suspense; there were the two travellers, reclining on the grass, unsuspicious of impending evil; and there, in the dense maze of verdure behind them, were the two sinister countenances, with eyes glaring as if upon intended victims. All of a sudden two objects were thrown forth, precisely at the same instant, from amidst those trees, and the next moment the two unfortunate travellers

were writhing, convulsing and seeming by their desperate movements to be battling for their very lives. The Burker comprehended it all. Cords, with nooses at the ends, had been thrown forth from amidst the shade of the trees. With such unerring skilfulness and terrible precision were these lassoes used that the nooses had fallen around the necks of the two travellers, while the murderers amongst the trees were drawing the cords tight, so that the wretched victims were already in the agonies of death.

Accustomed though the Burker was to deeds of crime, not only in respect to their contemplation, but also their perpetration, he was nevertheless astounded, horrified, and appalled at this spectacle. Even if he had wished to move, he had not the power; his limbs were paralyzed, his blood had all curdled in his veins. He could no longer see the murderers within the grove, but he had a frightful view of their victims, who were writhing in the agonies of death and vainly grasping at the cords which were tight around their throats. At length their mortal sufferings were put an end to, and there they lay, still and dead, those who had so lately been in the enjoyment of vigorous life, exchanging convivial words, and with smiles upon their lips! The Burker felt as if a noose were around his own neck, and he dared scarcely even breathe, for fear lest he should betray his presence there and become the third victim.

The two assassins now emerged from their ambush. They were tall, athletic, well-made individuals, nearly naked, each with but a scanty garment of dark cloth fastened around the middle of the body. Their eyes had a ferocious glare, like those of wild beasts, and when they grinned at each other, with fierce, bloodthirsty satisfaction at the contemplation of the work they had performed, the Burker perceived that their teeth had been filed into points, so that they resembled those of a shark, or the sharp, jagged edge of a saw. Altogether there was something unnatural and fiendlike in the appearance of those miscreants, for though they had the human shape, it was scarcely possible to fancy that they were veritable human beings. The Burker trembled for his life, his breath was held with horrible suspense, his blood seemed to turn into ice in his veins.

Most of our readers will have comprehended that the two assassins belonged to the horrible sect of Thugs, or

Stranglers, which has not altogether disappeared from the peninsula of Hindustan. The Burker did not however know who they were, nor had he the slightest idea that their murderous pursuits constituted a sort of diabolic creed as well as a regular avocation. He took them to be mere banditti, who on this occasion had availed themselves of the readiest means of taking the lives of their victims whom they did not dare provoke to an open combat on account of the firearms they possessed.

The Stranglers, having gratified their horrible propensity for murderous deeds by gazing for a few minutes upon their victims, proceeded to take possession of their weapons, and then unfastening the cords from around the necks of the murdered men, the Thugs plunged again into the recesses of the grove. They did not tarry to rifle the persons of their victims; they did not even so much as open the knapsack which was slung over the shoulder of one of them, nor did they touch the liquor which the gourd contained, nor the remainder of the food which had been left upon the grass. They vanished from the Burker's view, bearing with them their fatal lassoes and all the weapons that had belonged to the victims of this hideous assassination.

For nearly half an hour, however, did the Burker remain in his hiding-place after the departure of the Stranglers. He was afraid to move. He now thought much less of snakes, reptiles, and tigers than of those horrible miscreants whose victims lay stretched motionless before his eyes. At length the Burker began to take courage somewhat, and thinking that the coast must now be completely clear, he stole forth from his hiding-place. It was still, however, with fear and trembling that he approached the corpses, for by so doing he approached likewise that very part of the grove where the lassoes had been thrown forth. The murderers might still be there, and one of those fatal cords might be thrown out for its deadly noose to encircle his own neck as he had seen both circle the necks of the dead toward whom he was now cautiously and timidly advancing. But all was still, and the Burker, gaining more and more courage, proceeded to possess himself of the gourd, the knapsack, and the remnant of provisions. He longed to tarry and rifle the persons of the dead, for if he found money upon them it might be serviceable to him if ever he should succeed in

getting out of that jungle; but a sudden rustling amongst the trees made him flee away for his very life. He was at a considerable distance before he dared to look back, and then he beheld not the forms of the miscreants whom he so much dreaded that his eyes would encounter.

He succeeded in gaining his cavern, but there was another source of surprise and mystification for him. A fire had evidently been lighted in front of the cave during the day; another mass of boiled rice and a quantity of fruits were left in the niche underneath the loophole. But no human being was to be seen on that spot except the Burker himself. The man was seized with a sort of vague and awful terror, as if with the sense that he was the object of some design on the part of preternatural powers. Perhaps the Enemy of Mankind himself was placing that food in his way, more effectually to seal his doom than his own antecedent crimes could have done? But this was an impression that could not be permanently made on such a mind as the Burker's, and he began to have an inkling of the real truth. Doubtless that cavern served as a temporary halting-place for wayfarers through the dreadful jungle, and doubtless, likewise, the food was left by some well-provided person for the use of any less fortunate individual who might be compelled to trust entirely to such thoughtful charity. These were the ideas that now arose in the Burker's mind, and the reader in already aware how consistent they happened to be with the actual truth.

He was now well supplied with provisions for the next two or three days, and he found that the gourd contained some exceedingly potent spirit. He ate and drank heartily, but his soul was the prey to a continuous trouble, for he dreaded lest chance or previous knowledge should bring the shark-teethed murderers to his cave. On examining the knapsack, he found that it contained a quantity of despatches, written in a manner which he could not possibly comprehend, and he therefore concluded that the victims of the Stranglers must have been messengers bearing some documents from one Indian authority to another.

When the darkness set in, the Burker barricaded the place with even greater precautions than those he had previously adopted. He slept but little that night, and when slumber did fall upon his eyes, it was more than ever feverish

and uneasy, for not merely were his dreams now haunted by wild beasts and reptiles, but likewise by the images of human beings as terrible as the tiger and as stealthly as the serpent.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TIGER

On awaking in the morning, the Burker seriously reflected upon his position, and he came to the fixed resolve of escaping out of that jungle, or perishing in the attempt. Being thus determined to abandon the hospitable cave, the Burker filled the knapsack with the remnant of his provisions and slung it over his shoulders. He likewise took with him the gourd, for it still contained no inconsiderable quantity of spirits, which being of a very potent character, produced much effect with even the smallest dram.

It cost the Burker some regret to leave the cavern that had sheltered him, for he felt like a man who was leaving a harbour of comparative safety to enter upon the terrific perils of unknown seas. Perhaps, indeed, the miscreant would have remained altogether in that place, trusting to the benevolence of wayfarers to continue their supplies of provision, but after the tragedy which he had beholden in the jungle, he could not linger in a neighbourhood which appeared to be infested with human monsters as formidable as those which belonged to the brute creation. The Burker accordingly set out, with his gourd and his knapsack, to enter upon the stupendous task of finding an issue from the jungle. Let the reader conceive how great would have been the danger and the consternation of those mariners of the olden time who were the first to penetrate into the awful watery solitudes of the South Pacific, if their compass had been lost. But almost equally hopeless was the task now entered upon by this man, exposed to a thousand perils, without firearms or weapons of any kind to protect himself against the wild animals that swarmed in the solitudes of that jungle, ignorant of the way he ought to pursue, and

going forth to trust entirely to hazard and to accident to guide him out of this dread, inhospitable region.

Not far had the Burker proceeded when at a distance of about a hundred yards ahead he perceived a tall object, which he had at first taken for a tree or shrub, suddenly put itself in motion. What at the outset he had fancied to be the branches all in an instant expanded and seemed to be flapping violently. The idea that it could be a bird flashed through the Burker's mind, but a bird of at least seven feet in height appeared to him an impossibility. Yet a second thought made him reflect that a country which could produce snakes so monstrous as those which he had seen might contain amongst its zoological wonders birds as colossal as the object which he now beheld at a little distance. He stood still, less terrified perhaps than he had been at the sight of other living things the very names of which made the blood run cold and the flesh creep upon the bones, but still he was far from feeling comfortable.

It was indeed a bird which the man was contemplating, and it was now walking slowly away from the spot where he first saw it. We may as well inform the reader that it was one of the adjutant species, which often attains the height of five feet, and sometimes grows to the proportions of this specimen which the Burker was now surveying. Slowly it proceeded, until appearing suddenly to catch sight of a form to which the eye was unaccustomed, it advanced toward the Burker. Now the man was seized with a complete terror; he turned and fled. But the giant adjutant bird was speedily in his close vicinage, and, apprehending a sudden attack, he snatched up a large stone against which his foot kicked. Fortunate for him was it that he stepped back at the same moment with the speed of lightning, for from the very spot whence he had picked up the stone, a cobra di capello darted forth, raising its hideous hooded head, hissing and preparing to spring at him. In another moment the adjutant bird seized the cobra in its bill, and the Burker availed himself of the circumstance to place a still greater interval between himself and that colossal specimen of the feathered tribe. He looked back; the reptile had disappeared from the bill of the bird, and the bird itself was slowly walking away in a contrary direction to that which the Burker was pursuing.

Relieved from that source of apprehension, the wanderer continued his path, — if path it could be called where beaten road there was none, and where he advanced amidst thick underwood or rank grass, or else over patches of sward where the herbage was short and sweet, constituting the few oases of wholesome vegetation in that wilderness. For a couple of hours the Burker proceeded without experiencing any fresh peril or alarm, until all of a sudden he was startled by a terrific crashing amongst a neighbouring thicket, and thence emerged a huge animal, which by the trunk and the long ivory tusks he knew to be an elephant. The brute seemed to be either in a naturally wild or else frightened state, for on emerging from the brake, it stood snorting, elevating its trunk, and pawing, or, rather, trampling the ground with its feet. The Burker stood transfixed with terror for a few moments; he was then about to turn and fly, when there was a sudden rush from the same thicket, and another animal made its appearance. The next moment the elephant and this newcomer closed, as it were, in combat, and still was the Burker transfixed, gazing upon the awful scene.

The brute with which the elephant was thus engaged was of considerably less dimensions, and it had a long, curving tusk, or horn, on the upper part of its snout. The wanderer in the jungle knew not what it was, but the reader has by this time comprehended that it was a rhinoceros, the deadly foe of the elephant. Each seemed to be fully aware of the mode of attack that would be adopted by the other. The elephant rushed at the rhinoceros to pierce it with its long tusks, but the rhinoceros, though apparently so unwieldy, wheeled about, escaped the meditated blow, and then rushed in with the intention of ripping its opponent's belly with its own tusk. Then the elephant itself displayed a similar agility, and with a sudden movement received the blow upon its haunch, where its impenetrable skin was an effective armour of resistance. Then front to front they were again; this time the elephant's sharp-pointed tusks pierced the side of the rhinoceros, near the shoulder, and the next moment the horn of the wounded brute was driven up with all the force of the impulsive head into the belly of the elephant. Down fell the huge animal, a strange and terrific sound denoting its mortal agony, while

the victorious rhinoceros, drawing back for an instant, rushed forward and inflicted another hideous ripping wound.

The Burker meanwhile had been gazing with indescribable feelings of mingled awe and horror, but he now tarried to behold no more, for he dreaded lest the conquering brute should seek him as another victim. He plunged farther and farther into the jungle, his brain dizzy with the idea of all the horrors that surrounded him, and lost in an appalling wonderment as to what new spectacle might suddenly burst upon his view. He drew near a forest which stretched far as the eye could reach upon his right hand, and if he had been skilled in the vegetable history of Hindustan, he would have known that it was an immense assemblage of those superb teak-trees which rival the British oak in the building of ships. Avoiding the forest as much as possible, on account of the double perils of boa-constrictors and Stranglers, the Burker turned away to the left, and another hour's journey brought him to a new scene of verdure. Here towering palm-trees were laden with their fruit, — that fruit which he could not reach; but he beheld countless monkeys running up the stems and playing amongst the branches. Mangoes were there growing in wild abundance, but the Burker dared not eat of them, for he was afraid of being poisoned. Pepper-vines and cardamom-plants were richly interspersed around; the plantain and the jack were likewise flourishing there.

The beams of the vertical sun were now fraught with so intense a sultriness that the Burker would have given worlds to be enabled to seek some grateful shade, but for the reasons above set forth he dared not. He was athirst, for since he had left his cavern he had found no pool nor stream with whose waters he might moisten his feverish lips. He dragged himself painfully along, but in another half-hour he reached a broad stream. Here he sat down to slake his thirst and bathe his feet, but scarcely had he taken off his shoes, when a long, terrific head was thrust up above the surface of the water at a little distance, and the gaping jaws showed frightul ranges of teeth. With a cry, a perfect yell of agony, which resounded through those wilds, the Burker started up to his feet, snatched up his shoes, and darted away. On glancing back, he beheld a tremendous alligator emerge from the river, and more quickly sped the

affrighted wretch, his mind suffering excruciations as terrific as if he were actually in the jaws of the stupendous reptile. But when he again looked around, he perceived that he was safe from pursuit, and he sank exhausted and in despair upon some masses of granite rock. Tears coursed their way down the face of the unhappy man. He who had never known what compunction was when about to perpetrate a crime, he who had even done murder's work without remorse, now wept at the fearful position in which he found himself. Whichever way he turned, spectacles of horror or of danger — indeed, of both combined — presented themselves. The grass under his feet, the trees above his head, the brakes on one hand, the thickets on the other, the very streams with whose waters he sought to slake his thirst, were all teeming with living beings threatening him with a horrible death. Little had the miscreant ever thought of a future state or of punishments in a world to come, but now it seemed to him as if there were veritably a hell upon earth, affording a frightful foretaste of the one that was to be experienced hereafter.

The Burker put on his shoes, and wiping away the tears which had flowed down his cheeks, he applied himself to the contents of the gourd in order to acquire the reckless courage of desperation. He now looked about him to ascertain the nature of the spot where he had sunk down exhausted. We have already said that he had thrown himself upon some granite blocks, and a closer inspection showed him that they belonged to the ruins of an edifice. These ruins occupied about a quarter of an acre, and the wanderer walked slowly around them. Whatever the edifice might have been, it had almost completely yielded to the effects of time or else to some convulsion of nature, for it had fallen into a destruction that well-nigh rendered it a heap of shapeless, meaningless ruins. But presently the Burker discovered the remnant of a gateway, the upright pillars of which still remained. He looked in, and the burning beams of the vertical sun fell fully upon a figure of hideous appearance and colossal dimensions, which appeared to be seated upon an elevation such as a throne or an altar. Despite the potent alcohol which he had imbibed from the gourd, the wanderer's mind was still so attenuated as to be keenly susceptible of the most startling impressions, and his first

idea was that a country which teemed with such monsters of the brute creation might likewise possess human beings of a giant shape. But it was only an effigy of black marble on which the Burker was gazing, — a Hindu deity that had survived, so to speak, the ruin of the temple which enshrined it. The Burker soon saw that it was only an image; he gathered courage, and he penetrated a little way farther, taking a position where the overhanging masses of a once shapely masonry protected him from the beams of the sun. There he sat down, and opening his knapsack, partook of his provisions. Another application to the gourd strengthened his mind in the sense of a reckless desperation, and presently sleep stole upon his eyes.

For about a couple of hours the wearied wanderer thus slept, and as he slowly awoke, it was to encounter the aspect of the colossal effigy of black marble. For a few moments he gazed with an appalled consternation, for during the interval of slumber he had forgotten where he was and what object he had last seen. By degrees, however, the recollection came back to his mind, and it was also by degrees that he grew aware of some lifelike motion on the surface of the black marble effigy. He looked with increasing horror in his gaze and in his mind, and his hair stood on end as he gradually comprehended the hideous truth. Numerous snakes, of small dimensions, were creeping over the Hindu deity, some twining around its brow, others dragging their slimy folds over its face, some twisting around its arms, some winding about its legs, others hissing as they trailed their lengths upon its body. The Burker discerned likewise that these reptiles were hooded like the cobra, though they were of a different colour. They were indeed the manilla snakes, endowed with a venom as deadly as the cobras themselves; but instead of lurking in the grass, they delighted in infesting old buildings and dragging their slimy coils over granite or marble. There was something appallingly horrible in the spectacle of those serpents thus playing about the motionless image, and the Burker, so soon as he could in any way recover from the consternation into which the sight had thrown him, rushed forth from amidst the ruins of that temple. His ears as he thus beat a precipitate retreat were saluted with such a commingling of horrible hissings that he fancied the whole reptile population of the temple must be swarming

out in pursuit of him; so that again did his blood curdle in his veins, again did an ice chill appear to smite his heart, and again did the very flesh creep upon his bones.

Bitterly did he now repent having left his cavern. Better, far better were it for him to have remained there, even though it were to encounter the peril of the Stranglers' deadly noose, than to wander thus forth amidst scenes where, if he only lay down to rest, it was in the midst of a swarm of venomous reptiles. No thought had the wretch of thanking Heaven for having preserved him from the hideous danger which for two hours he had unconsciously incurred, but he gave vent to terrific imprecations against his folly for having quitted the cave. To return thither was impossible; he had not studied to preserve the recollection of any landmarks to guide him back to it, and he could no more from memory retrace his way than he could spontaneously discover an issue from the jungle.

Yet where was he to sleep at night? Not upon the grass, not under a tree, not up in the branches of a tree itself, not by the side of a river, not amidst any ruins on which he might stumble. There was death everywhere in that frightful place. Death looked out upon him from every thicket, from every tree, from every brake, from every stone. Surely, surely it was hell upon earth. To die by his own hand? Yes, but how? He had no weapon. Ah, strangulation? He might suspend himself to a tree? No, for he dared not even approach a tree for that purpose. The wretch must live; he felt that he must live on until he should become a prey to the tiger, the snake, or the venomous serpent.

He pursued his way, dragging himself slowly along, his only hope being that the jungle must have an end somewhere or another, and that possibly, yes, by the barest possibility, he might escape the myriad perils of that wilderness and find himself safe at last. Oh, what a faint hope! and yet it was the only one to which the wretch could possibly cling. He endeavoured to sustain himself therewith as he pursued his way, but his progress was exceedingly slow, for even when evening approached, the heat continued to be most oppressive.

The sun was setting when the Burker reached a large barren space of two or three acres in extent, and which

presented the singular aspect of a perfect desert in the midst of all the surrounding wild, rank, and luxuriant verdure. How this utter desolation on that spot could possibly be, the man suspected not, but it no doubt arose from some volcanic action, which geologists could satisfactorily explain. Here the Burker resolved to lie down and rest himself for the night, for though he could scarcely deem himself secure from roaming wild beasts, yet he at least fancied he was safe against the insidious attacks of reptiles, and surrounded by so many frightful perils as he was, it naturally appeared a consolation to have even a portion of them for the time mitigated or set at rest.

The dusk closed in around him, or rather, we should say, as much of dusk as there was in that clime and at that season of the year, and the Burker slept. How long he had slumbered he knew not, but he was awakened by the most frightful din. The whole jungle seemed alive with horrible noises, the howls, the cries, and the yells of wild beasts all mingling in one appalling and stupendous chorus. The wretched man started up with his hair standing on end, his frame quivering violently, and his heart palpitating with such force that it seemed as if it must burst. He listened in awful consternation; he could catch the sounds of objects rushing amongst the underwood and the long, rank grass which bounded the desert place that he had chosen for his home during the night. It seemed as if death in some frightful shape must every minute overtake him, and imagination can conceive nothing more horrible than the din by which he was environed. For all the living things in that jungle to be thus disporting, gamboling, quarreling, or fighting, was something more than the human brain could endure. He felt as if he were going mad; a terrible bewilderment seized upon him, he rushed hither and thither, until at length he sank down completely exhausted, and his senses abandoned him.

When he came back to consciousness, the sun was rising above the distant trees; the jungle was all completely quiet once more. The heat soon became so intense that it appeared to extinguish every trace of life save that of the Burker's only. But even the smallest insects which had swarmed during the night had now vanished, and the atmosphere seemed dead with its heavy, immovable, torrid

oppressiveness. The Burker shuddered with horror as he thought of the terrific din which had startled him up in the middle of the night, and he wondered that he had not fallen a victim to the wild beasts which had raged or frolicked during the hours of the sun's absence. To pass such another night as that, in the midst of the jungle, seemed an absolute impossibility, and the Burker asked himself, in literal anguish of mind, whether it were possible to find an issue from the wilderness during the many long hours of daytime that were now before him. He partook of his food, he drank of the contents of the gourd, and he resumed his way.

The desert spot was left behind; he was once again floundering through the jungle. In about an hour he reached a forest, composed entirely of bamboos growing to a considerable height. Nothing could surpass the picturesque magnificence of that scene, but the Burker scarcely comprehended it. Heaven knows he was in no humour to contemplate whatsoever beauties nature might present to the view in the midst of that wilderness. Taking care not to approach too near to the trees of that forest, he pursued his way amidst the long grass, until all in a moment he was startled by a savage growl, and looking around with an agonizing sense of horror, he beheld an immense tiger at a little distance. There was a tree near. Forgotten all in a moment was the possibility that a boa-constrictor might be coiled amongst its branches, and for his life did the Burker rush to that tree. If in cool, deliberate moments he had attempted to climb up the trunk, his progress would have doubtless been laboured and slow, but now it was with the veritable agility of a monkey that, with arms and legs deftly moving, the aim was accomplished. The tiger bounded to the foot of the tree just as the Burker succeeded in grasping the lowest branches, and the animal gave another terrific howl as it found that its intended victim had escaped. High up toward the Burker the tiger leaped; the frightened man drew himself, as it were, into the narrowest possible compass. At the same moment there was a rustling amongst the leaves of the branches projecting from the opposite side of the tree, and down was flung the hideous length of an immense snake, its coils being wound about the tiger's body with lightning rapidity.

So horrified was the Burker at this spectacle that his

hands relaxed their hold upon the branches, and he nearly fell, when he clutched them convulsively again. As a man looks down with consternation and with a cold, creeping feeling of the flesh into the depth of a tremendous gulf, so looked down the Burker from amidst the foliage of the tree at the scene that was taking place below. The coils of the immense snake had been flung around the tiger just at the very moment it was springing upward in the hope of reaching the Burker, and thus the reptile's deadly folds had circled the fore legs of the animal, pinioning them as it were to its neck. The tiger fell down, and by means of his hind legs, as well as with the convulsing litheness and elasticity of its body, it plunged and writhed and made the most desperate efforts to escape from its fearful enemy. But all in vain. The boa-constrictor had its tail coiled tight around the branch from which it had thrown itself, and not more securely is a ship kept at anchor by its cable than that tiger was held fast by the supple length of the snake.

At first terrific howls and cries of anguish burst from the tiger's mouth, but these soon ceased, for the constricting folds circled its neck as well as all the fore part of its body; and those folds were tightened with all their terrific power, until the captured brute was compelled to desist from its howlings by the sense of strangulation. The snake seemed to have done enough for the present, or else, with a hideous malignity, it purposed to play with its victim ere completely despatching it; or else, perhaps, conscious how completely the tiger lay in its power, it wished to ascertain to what extent the brute's efforts might go to release itself from the binding coils. At all events the snake remained quiet, when the tiger, exhausted by its ineffectual endeavours to escape from the folds, lay motionless as if dead.

The Burker had desperately clutched the branches in order to retain himself in the tree, and looking down, he observed all that we have been describing. He could see the head of the reptile lying flat upon the tiger's back, close by the side of its own last slimy fold, and the eyes, small, shining like diamonds, but with a dread sinister light, seemed to be looking up at the man in the tree. Cold and horrible was the shudder which swept through the Burker's form as he wondered within himself why the snake had not attacked him in preference to the tiger. He knew not

that the instinct of the reptile taught it to prefer that which was its natural and known enemy rather than assail a form which it was but little accustomed to behold in the jungle, — a human form the like of which perhaps the reptile had never seen before. Indeed, if the Burker had been better instructed in the habits of that species of snake, he would have known that he might now in all safety descend from the tree and continue his way, for that the reptile and the tiger would never separate until one should have become the victim of the other. But all this the Burker knew not, and consequently he dared not think of effecting his escape. Indeed, he fancied that if he were to descend from the tree, the serpent might suddenly loosen its hold upon the tiger to fling its deadly coils around himself, and that thus he should become exposed to the attack of both the snake and the wild beast.

But to be doomed to remain in that tree, and witness the spectacle that was passing underneath, was an idea so horrible that the man's brain reeled, a species of vertigo seized upon him, and again was he about to fall from the tree, when he was startled by a sudden howl of mingled rage and anguish that burst from the mouth of the tiger. Oh, with what tenacity did the Burker again clutch the branches of that tree! How fearful was the shuddering that swept through his entire frame! How excruciating was the sense of his hideous position!

It was but one howl which the tiger thus sent forth at that moment, for the coils which the snake had probably loosened in malignant sport for an instant were suddenly drawn tight again. The brute was half-strangled once more, but it made the mightiest and most desperate efforts to release itself from the deadly coils. It lashed the grass and ground with its tail, and therewith likewise it dealt terrific blows at the snake itself. It tried to tear the reptile with its hinder claws. It convulsed, it writhed, it rolled itself about; its agony was horrible. Then the snake tightened its coils just sufficiently to overpower its victim without actually extinguishing its life, and there was another dread interval of silence. Tight around the branch of a tree remained the tail of the snake; its long, supple body hung down like an immense rope, gradually becoming thicker and thicker until it attained the dimensions of the

Burker's thigh, and then each successive coil became less and less in circumference, to the thin, tapering neck on which the comparatively small head was fixed. During this second interval of silence, this period of suspended death-struggles on the part of the tiger, the reptile's eyes again appeared to be looking up toward the Burker with a gleaming, vibrating light. He endeavoured to avert his own gaze, but he found it irresistibly bent down again upon those small dark brown reptile orbs that were twinkling as diamonds.

Again, all of a sudden, was there a desperate effort made by the tiger to release itself. With all the power of its hind legs, and of its form, which was well-nigh as supple as that of the snake itself, did it strive to drag the reptile down from the tree. The boa-constrictor seemed to elongate like a tightened cable when a ship is pulling hard at its moorings; but in a few moments the wondrous elasticity of the serpent was displayed, for, apparently without an effort, it shortened its length, as it were, and drew the tiger completely in toward the root of the tree. Then, the Burker, with hair standing on end, and the flesh creeping coldly, heard the crashing of the bones of the agonizing wild beast, for the coils of the snake were giving the last fatal evidence of their constricting power. Slowly advanced the snake's head, farther and farther over the body of the tiger; tighter and tighter became the coils; more continuous, but likewise more and more languid, grew the convulsions and the writhings of the perishing wild beast. At length the tiger lay motionless, but not this time to recover from its exhaustion and gather strength for a new effort to shake off its enemy. The tiger was dead.

Again there was an interval of silence, and the Burker might have fancied that the snake was dead likewise, were it not that its eyes continued to gleam with that horrible reptile light, and that its length between the branch sustaining its tail and the commencement of its coils around the tiger dangled lazily to and fro, like a partially loosened cable agitated by the wind. But not long was this interval of silence, for soon did the bones again begin to crash, and now all along the supple length of the serpent there were the evidences of the strong muscular motion, the vibrations and the tensions, by which the constricting process was carried on against the last impediments. The

tiger lay with its mouth open, its tongue lolling out and dabbled with blood. Its green eyes were fixed in a glassy stare, and the constricting power of the reptile gave a continuous oscillating motion to the form of the wild beast itself. Gradually the snake wound its coils completely about the tiger, which thus kept on elongating in the powerful gripe of each iron fold. The boa proceeded deliberately with the work that it was accomplishing; it had to break the bones in every part of the brute's body, and thus at length its neck encircling the hinder legs, drew them tight up against the belly of the wild beast. Ribs, legs, backbone all were thus successively crushed, so that at the expiration of a time the tiger presented to the view only one long, shapeless mass. Ever and anon the snake desisted for awhile, as if to rest, or as if to gloat over its triumph and its intended meal. And all this while the Burker remained in the tree, a spectator of the hideous scene.

Two mortal hours thus passed from the moment when the snake first flung its coils about the form of the tiger until the point which our description has just reached. Two mortal hours, — they seemed two centuries to the miserable man. Nothing could be more horrible than the sensation produced upon him by the breaking, crashing, and crushing of those bones. He felt as if the snake were coiled around himself, and as if they were his own bones which were thus frightfully yielding to the infernal pressure. Indeed, the world has no language possessing terms strong enough to convey an idea of all the wretch experienced during those two mortal hours. Nothing he had previously known of the horrors of the jungle could be compared to this crowning one. His compulsory vicinage to that monstrous reptile, measuring at least forty feet in length, was in itself a stupendous horror, but when he heard the bones crash, and, ignorant of the precise habits of the snake, trembled lest it should seek another victim, he felt as if he were about to yell forth in the wild anguish of a maniac.

But the reptile had other work to do. Gradually loosening its coils from around the tiger, it began to cover the elongated carcass with a slime which its livid jaws poured forth, its lambent tongue playing the while, and its eyes gleaming in a manner that added fresh details to the unspeakable hideousness of the entire scene. At the same time a most

sickly and revolting effluvium began to circle about the Burker as he sat up in the tree. It grew more and more intense; the whole atmosphere around him seemed poisoned. He thought that the strongest life could not remain proof against that disgusting odour; again did a species of vertigo seize upon him, and again did he clutch the branches with all his power in order to save himself from falling.

Aroused by that effort, more mechanical than voluntary at the time, he again looked down to behold the doings of the snake. It was preparing to enjoy the fruits of its triumph, to banquet after its own fashion upon its victim, to partake of its horrid meal. The Burker could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses when he perceived that the snake was preparing to swallow the lubricated and elongated carcass of the tiger. The reptile's head was of a smallness and its neck of a narrowness in comparison with the bulk of its body at the thickest part, that it seemed impossible for even an object a quarter as great as the dead wild beast to be swallowed in such a manner. How great therefore was the Burker's amazement, how breathless his horror how fearful the interest which he experienced, when he perceived the jaws of the snake open to an extent which readily allowed them to suck in, as it were, the head of the tiger. With its tail still retaining a firm hold of the branch of the tree, as if on this support depended the entire muscular power which the reptile possessed, it proceeded slowly, and it even appeared, painfully, to suck in the remainder. This appalling process lasted for nearly half an hour; then slowly did the boa disengage its tail from the branch, and as much of its length as had remained suspended to the tree dropped heavily to the ground. The snake now lay completely still; its head was buried somewhere amidst its coils, so that the vibrating eyes were no longer looking up at the Burker. He could perceive where, in the thickest part of its body, the mass of the swallowed tiger lay, for there was a tremendous bulging out of the reptile's form, defining the complete configuration of that degluted mass.

For nearly four hours had the Burker now remained in the tree, and he began to recollect something he had once heard or read of the torpid state in which reptiles remain for a long while after having partaken of a meal. Still he

dared not immediately descend from the tree, though stronger and stronger grew his belief and his hope that the serpent was now powerless to hurt him. The effluvium continued most poisonous, most sickly, for it mingled with the heavy, sultry air, which was itself stagnant and dead, and there was not the slightest breath of a healthful breeze to carry that odour away. Time was passing; the snake lay completely motionless, and at length the Burker ventured to agitate the branches. This experiment strengthened his belief and his hope, for not even so much as the reptile's head was raised from amidst the folds into which the boa had gathered itself at the foot of the tree. There it lay like a hideous shapeless mass, inert, to every appearance deprived of vitality.

Summoning all his courage to his aid, the Burker descended from the tree. A dread convulsing shudder shook him coldly as his feet touched the ground, — a shudder produced by the hideous apprehension that the snake might dart at him. But no, it still lay motionless. Then away he sped, away he sped as if for his very life, and he breathed not freely until, a considerable distance being completed, he looked back and saw that he was safe from all pursuit. Yet still he rushed on, anxious to place as long an interval as possible betwixt himself and the scene of the horrible spectacle which he had beholden. At length, thoroughly exhausted, he sank upon a sward of short, sweet herbage, near the brink of a well, the mouth of which was surrounded by granite blocks to a height sufficient to prevent any one from falling in if walking incautiously in the daytime or journeying that way in the dark.

Yes, the Burker was utterly exhausted, both in mind and body. He wondered how he had possibly survived the tremendous spectacle he had witnessed. It even appeared to him a dream, though it was indeed all a terrific reality. For awhile he forgot the cravings of hunger; he thought not even of strengthening himself with the contents of his gourd. It seemed as if he could not sufficiently reason his mind into the conviction that he had actually escaped with his life from the hideous perils which he had so recently encountered. But at length he addressed himself to his provisions, and he was exhilarated with the potent fluid which he imbibed from the friendly gourd.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STRANGLER

The Burker was seated upon the grass, partaking of the rice and fruits which his knapsack contained, as well as of the alcoholic beverage from the gourd, when, in his endeavour to put away from his thoughts the late hideous scene of which he had been a beholder, he began to reflect on the tragedy in which the shark-teethed Stranglers had played so direful a part. He recalled to mind the insidious manner in which they had from the maze of verdure first ascertained the precise position in which their victims were reclining ere they threw out their deadly lassoes. The Burker reflected how much it behoved him to be continuously on his guard against such stealthy, creeping, catlike miscreants, and he began revolving in his mind what he should do if circumstances happened to make him aware that such monsters in human shape were at any time menacing himself with danger. Anxious to divert his thoughts from the more recent incident of horror, he kept them steadfastly fixed on this other topic, and he weighed a dozen different plans of dealing with the Stranglers should he happen to fall in with them. But chiefly he perceived the necessity of keeping entirely on his guard, and not for an instant losing his presence of mind if the emergency should arise.

It was while thus meditating that he beheld something which put all his resolution to the test. We should remark that amongst the various remains of a superior civilization which formerly characterized that Hindu population whom British misrule and tyranny have thrown back and degraded, there are numerous tanks and wells in different parts of the Indian peninsula. These are sometimes to be found in the jungles themselves, for where those jungles

now serve as dwelling-places for reptiles and wild beasts, a consummate agriculture once flourished. It was by one of these wells that the Burker had seated himself, and, as we have already stated, the mouth was surrounded by large blocks of stone, forming a circular wall to the height of about two feet and a half. This wall was overgrown with bushes and long grass, constituting as it were a brake or thicket that nearly covered the entrance of the well, whose diameter was upwards of four feet. All in a moment, just as the Burker was looking toward the well, wondering how deep it could be, and whether he could by any possible means obtain some water thence to cool the lips and tongue that were parched by the alcohol as well as by the intense sultriness of the sun, he distinctly caught sight of a human eye gleaming at him betwixt an opening in the stones and through the thicket. A shudder swept over him, but it was imperceptible; and inasmuch as he had only an instant before made up his mind how to act in case of a particular emergency arising, he was not thrown off his guard. Fortunate for him was it that the very subject which now exacted all his self-possession should have so recently occupied his thoughts. In a word, he was fully prepared for that which now occurred.

He did not appear to take any notice of the circumstance itself, but laying himself flat down on the grass, he shaded his eyes with his hand as if to keep off the beams of the sun. He was nevertheless gazing sideways in the direction of the spot where he had seen the human eye, for that it was a man's eye he felt convinced, and equally certain was he that it belonged to one of the murderers of the two travellers, or else to some one who pursued similar avocations. He reflected what course he should pursue. He had the horrible conviction that if he were to rise up and attempt to seek safety in flight, the deadly lasso would in a moment be around his neck. It was to avoid this peril that he had thrown himself flat upon his back. He failed not to remember that the Stranglers had taken possession of the firearms of their recent victims, but he thought to himself that if the individual concealed in the well were really one of those Stranglers, if he still retained the firearms, and if he had purposed to use such a weapon on the present occasion, he would not have waited all this while, for it was so easy to

send a bullet whizzing through the same opening which served as the means for the view taken by that gleaming eye. It likewise occurred to the Burker that the Stranglers might have no powder and ball to render their firearms available, for he did not remember to have seen them take any such ammunition from about the persons of the murdered travellers.

But what was the Burker to do in order to escape from the enemy, or enemies, as the case might be? While lying flat upon the grass, he was safe from the lasso, but this position could not be maintained for ever. He believed a deadly struggle to be inevitable with whomsoever the well contained, for that it was really an enemy, or enemies, he was eqaully convinced, or else why should such secret ambush be maintained? After all the horrors endured in respect to reptiles and wild beasts, it was positively a relief to the Burker's mind to reflect that he had now to deal with human beings. It was a warfare more after his own fashion, and as the man naturally possessed a dauntless courage, he was not now to be overawed by the vicinity of a human foe. Indeed, he had become so reckless of life that he cared not how soon it was lost; at the same time it was a matter of satisfaction to reflect that if it were now to be surrendered it would not be to a snake nor a wild beast, and he was resolved also to sell that life of his as dearly as possible.

After some few minutes spent in meditation, he bethought himself of a stratagem to draw the enemy from the ambush, and thereby make himself aware of the number whom he might have to encounter, as well as of the nature of the hostile weapons against which he might be called upon to defend himself. He accordingly feigned to be asleep. Gradually he suffered the hand with which he had shaded his eyes to fall away from his face and drop upon the grass, with the languid, uncontrolled movement of one who was veritably slumbering. At the same time he turned himself a little more sideways, as if the beams of the sun caused this motion, even on the part of a sleeper, and he kept one eye just so slightly open that he could still discern anything that might take place at the mouth of the well.

A few more minutes now elapsed, when the Burker beheld a dark countenance appearing above the thicket, and he

recognized it to be that of one of the shark-teethed assassins of the two travellers in another part of the jungle. The Strangler was gazing with his penetrating eyes upon him, and being apparently satisfied that the Burker really slept, he drew himself up more and more above the thicket and the stones. He had on his dark, scanty garment, just the same as when the Burker had previously seen him, but he seemed to have no weapons of any kind, except the lasso, which was now tied around his waist.

It was a relief to the Burker's mind thus to ascertain the condition in which the Strangler presented himself. Stealthily he stepped forth from his ambush, and he seemed to be alone, for he tarried not to be followed by any companion, nor did he look down into the well to make any sign or to whisper any word. He now laid himself flat upon the grass, and began noiselessly dragging himself toward the Burker. This the Burker by no means liked, for the idea of a subtle poison at the point of some small, sharp instrument instantaneously flashed through his startled brain. For a few moments longer he remained undecided how to act, while the Strangler was working his noiseless way nearer and nearer toward him. All in a moment the Burker sprang up, but quick as his own movement was that of the Hindu, and not more quickly do two wild animals close in the deadly strife than did these two men grapple with each other. The Burker was astonished at the degree of strength developed by his opponent, whose wiry form, with but little flesh upon it, seemed likewise to be endowed with an extraordinary elasticity. The Burker felt that all his own energies were needed, for he read a ferocious desperation in the sinister gleaming eyes of the Strangler. Those two men regarded each other as if the feeling were mutual that the safety of one could only be secured by the death of the other; and thus, after they had grappled together with the lightning agility already described, they paused for an instant, as if mutually to read each other's purpose in their eyes. Then the struggle commenced.

With a cry that resembled the mingled howl and yell of a wild beast, the Burker endeavoured to hurl his opponent to the ground, but the Hindu, anticipating the movement, grasped the Burker's neckcloth with such terrific force as almost to strangle him. Then the Burker dealt tremendous

blows with his great thick boots at the bare legs of the Strangler, so that the latter, unable to endure the agony, loosened his hold. But not a sound fell from his lips. No accent of either rage or pain escaped him; in total silence did he conduct his hostile proceedings, as if he were dumb.

His hold was loosened but for an instant, and then he closed in such a manner with the Burker that the latter was no longer able to use his legs as weapons of offence, but had quite enough to do to prevent himself from being thrown down. Mustering up all his strength, arming himself, as it were, with all the energies that he could possibly call to his aid, he made a tremendous effort to bring down his foe. But quick as lightning the Hindu darted away to a little distance; in the twinkling of an eye the lasso was taken from over the folds of his garment, and its length was flung forth as rapidly as the boa-constrictor had ere now thrown itself from the tree upon the tiger.

The Burker was however fully on his guard, and as the noose approached him he caught it in his hand. With a sudden jerk it was torn away, and the Strangler disappeared amidst the bushes and long grass at a little distance. The Burker waited for some minutes with all the keen wariness of one who was not to be taken by surprise, but the Strangler reappeared not. The man sat down to rest himself, still, however, keeping his eyes fixed upon the spot where the Hindu had vanished. Half an hour passed, and no sign was there of the Strangler; no sound indicated his return. The Burker gave vent to a bitter imprecation that the encounter should have finished in such a manner, for he could not help thinking that his enemy would dog him through the jungle in the hope of taking him unawares. Thus the Burker's position acquired a new horror, for he was not only exposed to the ferocious attacks of wild beasts and the more stealthy hostility of reptiles, but he had now to guard against a monster in human shape possessing the fierceness of the former and the subtlety of the latter.

He rose and continued his way; but like Robinson Crusoe on the island, after having seen the print of a man's foot upon the sand, he kept looking around him, with anxious uneasiness and nervous alarm, in every direction. Thus he toiled on through the jungle until night began to close in, and then, utterly exhausted, he felt the absolute necessity

of seeking some place where he might repose. But where was he to find such a spot? Perhaps the Strangler was at no great distance; perhaps he had been creeping on amidst the bushes and the long grass, heedless of the venomous reptiles that might be lurking there; peradventure even at that moment he might be within a few yards of the Burker, waiting for an opportunity to throw his lasso with better effect than on the former occasion. The wretched English criminal was goaded almost to desperation, and again did thoughts of suicide enter his head. He now walked feebly and like a drunken man, with the sense that if he were to stop short he must sink down, and probably become a prey to the unseen enemy whom he believed to be dogging his footsteps.

Such was the Burker's state of mind and such his physical condition when, as the dusk was closing in around him, he beheld a clump of trees which by their configuration he thought he had seen before. Yes, he felt convinced of it. He looked about him, he beheld some other object which was familiar; he was in the neighbourhood of the very cave where he had previously found an asylum, and where unseen hands had afforded him the means of appeasing his hunger. He experienced a feeling of relief, while he marvelled that by a long, circuitous route his wanderings should thus have brought him back to a place which he had fancied to have been abandoned for ever.

The cave was soon reached, and the Burker's first thought was to look and see if there were any provisions in the niche under the loophole; but there was none. He set about to fortify the cavern with even greater precautions than he had used on the former occasions, and when his task was accomplished, he partook of the food and liquor which he still possessed, and of which he had a supply sufficient for the morrow. His former experiences at the cave had led him to believe, or at least to hope, that it was safe against the intrusion of venomous reptiles, but how far secure it might prove against the designs of his human foe, he knew not. He therefore dreaded the approach of slumber when he felt a drowsiness stealing over him, and in order to shake it off he rose up and walked about the cave, which penetrated to the distance of about six or seven yards under the hill in which it was hollowed. All of a sudden his foot kicked

against something soft, apparently a human form. A cry of alarm was on the very point of bursting from the Burker's lips, as he fancied that it might possibly be the Strangler who had got before him to that hiding-place; but he kept back the exclamation at the very instant that it was about to peal forth, for though his foot had come in strong concussion with that object, whatever it were, there was no movement on its part. The Burker stooped down, in the utter darkness which prevailed in the cave, and, full of horrified suspense, he passed his hand over the object. He encountered garments of some sort, and now his hand came in contact with another hand, but its touch was that of death! There was a human corpse in that cave.

The Burker's blood congealed in his veins, he shuddered from head to foot, a glacial horror took possession of him. He had barricaded himself in that cave with a corpse! His soul revolted in superstitious dread from the unseen body, and yet he dared not dash down his granite barriers and issue forth from that cavern, for fear of becoming a prey to the terrible Strangler who might be lurking outside. But, oh, to pass an entire night — short though an Eastern night be — in that den, along with a dead body, — the idea was intolerable! If he had seen it, if he knew precisely how it looked, if he were aware of the manner in which the person had died, it would be all different; but he was utterly ignorant on these points. He sat himself down in the cave, near the barricade at the entrance, so as to be as remote as possible from the subject of his horror, and then ten thousand hideous ideas began trooping through his mind. He fancied he could hear the corpse move, that it was gliding toward him as noiselessly as the Strangler was creeping to approach him some hours back, and the wretched man thus went on giving way to his terrific imaginings until his hair stood on end, his eyes were staring through the darkness in wildest, almost frenzied horror. No inclination had he for slumber now; no need was there to battle against a sensation of drowsiness, for it stole not over him. He was broad awake, — never was he more completely awake in his whole life.

Thus the hours passed on, — hours that constituted one long, mortal agony for that wretched, wretched man. It was not enough to endure the horrors and dangers of the

jungle, the perils of wild beasts, of serpents, and of monsters in human form, but even in the cave which he had at least fancied to be a comparatively sure retreat, he found himself a prey to thoughts and feelings which were sufficient to drive him to madness. Not once did the man close his eyes that night, but there he sat, irresistibly abandoning himself to reflections and misgivings which would have made almost any other person suddenly shriek forth as a maniac. At length the glimmering of dawn began to penetrate through the interstices of the barrier he had fixed at the entrance of the cavern, but still the end of the cave remained enveloped in total darkness. Morning advances rapidly in the Eastern clime, and the sun soon poured forth its full effulgence. The Burker's mind felt relieved, and he began to remove the barricade from the mouth of the cavern. When this task was accomplished, he advanced toward the dead body, and drew it forward by the feet until the light revealed the entire form completely to the Burker's eyes. It was the body of an old Hindu, with a long gray beard, and its dress enabled the Burker to comprehend that the man had been one of those gossoons, or wandering dervishes, whom he had seen during his journey from Calcutta to Inderabad, when a prisoner in the suite of Queen Indora and her husband. But how came the man by his death? Was it from natural causes? Had he in illness dragged himself to that cave to die, or had he, when reposing there, been suddenly smitten by the hand of the destroying angel? The Burker knew not. There were no marks of violence upon the old man's person, but as the Burker examined him more and more closely, he perceived two little spots close together upon the calf of one of the thin emaciated legs. These spots resembled the punctures of a lancet, or of some other small, sharp-pointed instrument. They were of a livid hue on the dusky skin of the deceased, and it was only after the closest inspection that they were discernible at all. The Burker did not, however, fancy that these were in any way connected with the man's death, and he therefore came to the conclusion that he had died from some natural cause.

Issuing forth from the cave, the Burker looked cautiously about, keeping himself upon his guard against the deadly lasso of the Strangler, but no one was to be seen. He dragged

the corpse completely out of the cavern, and he found that in a species of wallet which the dead gossoon had about his person there was a quantity of cold boiled rice. The Burker could not afford to let pass such an opportunity of replenishing his own knapsack, even though the provender had been lying for hours in such near contact with a corpse. While he was engaged in transferring the rice to his wallet, he suddenly beheld three persons advancing from a little distance. He started up from his kneeling posture, and rapidly scrutinized them with mingled hope and apprehension. They might prove friendly disposed and help him to escape from the depths of the dreadful jungle, or they might prove as hostile as the Stranglers themselves. He saw that they were three gossoons, and now he was smitten with the dread that they might fancy he had murdered the individual who lay at his feet. They advanced rapidly, and at first showed by their looks that they were surprised at finding a European of his appearance in such a spot as that; then their eyes fell upon the corpse that lay upon the ground, and with shouts of mingled rage and horror they rushed toward the Burker. Two of them had huge clubs; the third had a long knife, which he drew from his girdle and brandished menacingly. The Burker made vehement signs to testify his innocence, and likewise to make the gossoons aware that he had found the corpse in the cavern. They seemed to comprehend him, but two of them held him fast, while the third proceeded to examine the corpse with the minutest scrutiny. We should observe that they were all three men of middle age, strong built, powerful, and looking more like ferocious depredators than the votaries of a religious sect.

All of a sudden the man who was examining the dead body pointed out the little punctures to the view of his comrades, and they at once let go their hold upon the Burker. They then all three began lamenting after their own rude fashion, — howling, beating their breasts, and making horrible contortions, while the one who possessed the knife took it and hacked himself in half a dozen places until he was covered with his own gushing blood. The other two took the knife in their turns, and did the same to themselves, while the Burker looked on with horror lest they should expect him to follow their example, or should else

offer to perform the disagreeable service for him. But they were evidently paying no attention to him; they seemed fully satisfied that he was not the murderer of their brother gossoon, and thus, as the Burker's confidence revived, he began to reflect on what had taken place. That the gossoons regarded the punctures as the cause of their friend's death, he felt convinced, and the idea stole into his mind that they were produced by the bite of a snake. If so, then even that cave itself was not proof against the fearful visitations of the stealthy reptiles, and the man's blood curdled with horror at the idea that he had possibly passed the night in that cavern with the very serpent that had pierced the unfortunate dervish with its envenomed fangs.

The three gossoons at length made an end of their lamentations, and they addressed the Burker in their own language, but he could not comprehend a syllable they said, neither did they understand him when he spoke to them in his English vernacular. They now intimated by signs that he was to leave them; he joined his hands in entreaty, but they shook their heads sternly, and motioned him to depart. Again he persevered in his endeavour to give them to understand that he besought permission to accompany them, but their signs only grew more peremptory, and the knife was brandished before his eyes. He was therefore compelled to sling on his knapsack and hasten away.

But as he moved off the thought occurred to him that the gossoons might probably only require his temporary absence while they performed some rites or ceremonies in respect to the deceased. He therefore resolved to watch them from a distance, and to approach them again if he beheld a suitable occasion. They however seemed determined that he should leave their vicinity altogether, and they quickly disabused him in respect to his last hope, for the one who was armed with a knife followed the Burker for a little while, and every time he looked around the gossoon kept making impatient signs for him to hasten still further away.

The wretched man was thus debarred of the chance which for a little while had seemed to favour him of being guided out of that dreadful jungle. He continued his way, and when the gossoon was no longer in sight, he sat down by the side of a rock from which a crystal spring gushed forth.

With that water he refreshed himself, but he still remained sitting there, pondering most despondingly his forlorn and desolate condition. Every now and then he awoke, as it were, with a kind of start from his reverie, and flung his anxious looks around, with the dread lest the Strangler were creeping stealthily toward him. He however beheld no one, and after awhile he resolved to continue his way once more. He was pursuing his path along a rough, uneven ground, always taking care to avoid the vicinity of trees as much as possible, and likewise to avoid the long grass, when he was suddenly startled by a rustling amongst some shrubs at a little distance, and the next moment he beheld a black animal, considerably larger than a cat, rush forth in pursuit of some smaller prey. It was a panther of diminutive size, but the instant it caught sight of the Burker it bounded toward him. The man turned to fly, for the green eyes of the panther gleamed at him with a terrible fierceness, but all in a moment a strange cry or yell of agony reached his ears, and glancing back, he observed that the panther had been seized upon by a cobra di capello of considerable size, — the largest, indeed, that the Burker had as yet seen since first he set foot upon the soil of India. He remained not, however, to witness the result of the conflict between the animal and the reptile, but he sped on with all the swiftness that he could command. Without at first perceiving it, he was retracing his way toward the cave, but he did not become aware of the fact until he reached the rock from whose side the crystal spring was gushing forth.

Almost maddened by the sense of this last peril which he had escaped, once again embracing the hope that by means of piteous entreaty he might induce the gossoons to guide him out of the jungle, and too reckless of life not to seek their presence once more, even though he should perish by the sharp blade which they had used against their own persons, the Burker resolved to go back to the cavern. It was now by no means difficult for him to find his way thither, but when he came in sight of the eminence in the bowels of which it was hollowed, he beheld nothing of the gossoons. Nor as he drew near its entrance did he behold the corpse of the deceased on the spot where he had last seen it. It struck him that the gossoons had probably buried it, and

that they might be reposing themselves in the cave. Assuming an aspect of the most piteous entreaty, he approached the cavern, but he beheld no one within. He however saw a wallet lying upon the ground, and he recognized it as that which had belonged to the deceased, and from which he had taken the rice. Before he touched it he assured himself that no one was in the cavern, — the dead gossoon as well as the living ones had disappeared.

Remembering that there were two compartments to the deceased's wallet, and that he had only examined one, he now lifted it up. In the second compartment he found nothing but the means of striking a light. By this discovery he was however gratified, for it enabled him to make a minute investigation of the cave. He was resolved to establish this cavern as his abiding-place, with the hope that some kindly disposed gossoon would sooner or later pass that way and guide him out of the jungle. He had seen enough to convince him that it was used as a halting-place for wanderers and wayfarers passing through that frightful wilderness, and he likewise fancied that it was the securest spot he could find in respect to wild beasts and reptiles. In that jungle no place was altogether secure, for it was evident that even there a snake had stolen in and bitten the old gossoon, probably while he was sleeping. Still in a district where every spot was perilous, this certainly appeared to be the least so of any. At all events it was better to remain stationary there than to go floundering about amidst the pathless wilds where every step was taken at the risk of his life.

Having made himself a torch of a resinous branch, holding it in one hand, and with a tolerably stout stick in the other, the Burker entered the cave. It was only at the innermost extremity beyond the loophole that it was quite dark, but now the torch illuminated it fully. He advanced cautiously, fearful lest at any moment a reptile should spring at him; he examined every crevice and corner, and he was just on the point of turning away with the conviction that the cavern was completely free from any insidious foe of the reptile species, when all of a sudden the light of his torch was reflected in two small gleaming objects at the extremity of the cavern, about a foot from the ground, and just in front of him. They were the eyes of a reptile, and the

blood ran cold in his veins. In a few moments the snake glided out from the hole where it was previously lurking; with a frightful hiss it raised itself up, and expanded its hood preparatory to taking the fatal spring, for it was a cobra. That strong shudder on the Burker's part was instantaneously followed by the complete recovery of all his presence of mind, for he was rendered desperate by the sense of danger, and just at the very moment that the reptile was about to dart at him, he struck it a blow with his stick. The aim was well taken; the serpent writhed in agony, but another blow despatched it.

Having thrown the snake forth from the cave, the Burker proceeded to examine it in every part with the closest possible scrutiny, but he discovered not another hole. He thrust his stick into the one whence the reptile had emerged, but there was no reason to imagine that there were any other snakes in the same ambush. He however stopped up the hole, and his examination being over, he bethought himself of a means of protecting the entrance of the cave from the insidious visits of such fearful guests for the future. He remembered that the houses on the outskirts of Inderabad had all gravel laid down at their doors, and as the fellow was not wanting in ingenuity nor keenness, it occurred to him that so invariable a custom must have a specific object, and what object could it be if not for the very one which he at all events now resolved to adopt as a suggestion? It moreover seemed to him natural enough that the reptile species would not drag their bellies over substances that might cut, graze, or wound them. He therefore began to chip off and break up pieces of the granite blocks which lay strewn about, and in this manner he occupied himself for the remainder of the day, taking good care, however, to be upon his guard against the insidious approach of that human reptile, the Strangler.

Before the dusk began to close in, the Burker had covered a large space of ground in front of the cave with the little fragments of granite, and thus for a distance of about six yards in length and three in width was this defence work formed. Having reconstructed his barrier, he sat down in the cavern to partake of his food, and his meal being finished, he found slumber stealing upon his eyes. Even before he was completely asleep, and while only cradled in the dreamy

repose which precedes total slumber, the image of the Strangler kept rising into his mind, so that every now and then he was startled into complete wakefulness, and then, with the cold perspiration upon his brow, he listened with suspended breath. Sometimes he almost fancied that he heard some one moving about in the vicinage of the cavern, or that his barricade of stones was being disturbed. Once or twice he imagined that he heard some one breathing quite near him inside the cave, and it was a long time before he could satisfy himself that all this was mere fancy. At length he fell into a profound slumber.

He knew not how long it lasted, but he was wakened up with the horribly oppressing conviction of some imminent peril. Again he listened with suspended breath, and gradually upon his ear came the sound of a stone being removed from the mouth of the cavern. Still he listened, his blood curdling in his veins. Yes, that sound was continued. Slowly and slowly was one of the granite blocks of his barrier being removed from its setting. By the glimmering light which prevailed outside, he could discern the gradual disappearance of the stone from the uppermost layer. He now knew that an enemy was at work, and what foe could this be unless the one of whose stealthy proceedings he had already received such proof?

How should he act? Many minutes elapsed before, in the horror of his feelings, he could make up his mind. At length he decided upon the course to be pursued. Taking it for granted it was the Strangler, he resolved to allow him to continue his work, and then ascertain in what manner his insidiously hostile demonstration was to be made. Perhaps he intended to form a sufficient aperture to introduce his person into the cavern, under the impression that the Burker slept; and if this were the case, the Englishman knew that he should be enabled to seize his enemy at a disadvantage and grapple with him successfully. He therefore pretended to sleep, while in reality continuing to keep a keen watch, and one after another he beheld four or five stones removed from their setting. He was ready at any instant to spring up and seize upon any form that might seek to introduce itself through the aperture. And sure enough, this was the intention of his enemy, for presently the aperture was completely darkened, and the form began

to penetrate. Like a snake ready to dart from its coil was the Burker prepared to spring, but whether it were that he made some slight movement, or that he suddenly held his breath in a way to convince the foe that he was not really asleep, we cannot say. Certain however it was that the enemy's form was all in a moment withdrawn, noiselessly though rapidly, and the Burker, rubbing his eyes, fancied that it must be a dream. The stones were restored to their setting, just as he had originally placed them; the aperture was filled up, and only the feeble glimmerings through the interstices met his view. All this, too, was done with no more noise than a pin would make in falling, nor from the slightest sound could he judge at what moment his enemy retired from the vicinity of the cave. The Burker however slept no more for the remainder of that night.

When morning came, he removed his barrier, and issued cautiously from the cavern. He was miserably desponding and low-spirited. His worst fears were confirmed, — the Strangler was resolved to have his life. And now, might not that mortal enemy abandon the idea of carrying on his warfare unassisted? Might he not invoke the succour of the comrade whom he had with him at the time the two travellers were murdered, and might they not fall boldly and openly together upon the Burker during the daytime? Resolved in such a case to sell his life as dearly as possible, the man procured a stout, strong, knotted cudgel, with which he knew that he could do desperate execution. But still he felt as if frightful perils hung over his head, and how anxiously, oh, how anxiously he kept watching for the appearance of some gossoon or other traveller who might be inclined to show a friendly spirit toward him.

Several hours passed. The sun was at its meridian height, pouring down its vertical beams, when the Burker, sitting in the shade of the entrance to his cavern, thought that he heard a sort of splashing noise in the direction of the spring of crystal water that gushed out behind the rock. Snatching up his club, he issued forth, passed noiselessly around the rock, and found himself face to face with the Strangler. The Hindu had most probably slipped down while endeavouring to climb that part of the rock in order to reconnoitre previous to an attack.

Like a wild beast did the Burker fly at the Strangler, at

whom he levelled a terrific blow with his bludgeon, but the Hindu dexterously caught the weapon with his hand, and once again did the two men close in the struggle. For several minutes it was maintained with desperate energy and on equal terms, but all in a moment, just as the Burker after a forcefully administered kick with his heavy boot upon the bare shin of his opponent, was about to follow up the advantage gained thereby and hurl him to the ground, the Strangler fastened his sharp-pointed teeth upon the Englishman's arm. Through coat sleeve and shirt penetrated those sharklike teeth, deep into the Burker's flesh they plunged, and the wretch roared with the pain. Then, with lightning rapidity, away flew the Strangler; out came the lasso, and it whistled through the air. But with equal rapidity did the Burker, maddened by the pain of his wound, rush in toward his foe; the noose of the lasso fell beyond him. The Strangler was stepping backward with marvellous agility, gathering in his cord at the same time to hurl it again, when he tripped over something and fell backward. The Burker was instantaneously upon him, but we should observe that the bludgeon had been dropped upon the spot where they first closed in the struggle.

Ill fared it now with the Strangler, for the Burker's knee was upon his chest, and a series of tremendous blows dealt by his stout fist half-stunned the Hindu. The Burker seized the cord, and slipped the noose over the head of his enemy; it tightened around the Strangler's neck, startling him up into fullest life. But the Burker pulled and pulled with ferocious vigour and determination; and diminishing the length of the lasso, he applied his foot to the Strangler's back in order to attain a purchase to pull the cord more tightly still. Terrific were the writhings, the convulsions, and the contortions of the miserable Hindu; he seemed as if he possessed a marvellous tenacity for life, and several minutes elapsed ere death put an end to his agonies. But at length he lay a corpse at the feet of the Burker.

Scarcely was the tragedy completed when a wild and mournful cry thrilled through the torrid stagnant air, and as the Burker turned quickly around, terribly startled by that cry, he caught a transient glimpse of a human form plunging into the midst of a maze of trees at a distance. Evanescent though that glimpse were, yet did the

Burker behold enough to convince him that it was the Strangler's friend whom he had just seen, and from whose lips that rueful lamentation pealed forth. Now, therefore, scarcely had the Burker gotten rid of one enemy when he experienced the consciousness of being exposed to the insidious proceedings of another, and thus, in the first flush of the signal victory he had obtained, was a damp thrown upon his spirits, and he felt the necessity of being as much as ever upon his guard.

Retaining possession of the lasso with which he had achieved his conquest, the Burker dragged the dead body into the midst of some long grass at a distance, and there he left it. Returning to his cave, he sat down to deliberate whether he should continue to abide there until the arrival of some friendly disposed person to guide him out of the jungle, or whether he should make one more desperate effort, unassisted and alone, to find an issue from that wilderness of horrors. That the surviving Strangler would haunt him with a restless pertinacity, and watch every opportunity to avenge the death of his comrade, the Burker had no doubt. Whether, therefore, he should remain where he was to dare that danger, or whether he should once more encounter the hideous perils of the pathless jungle, — these were the alternatives which he now seriously pondered. But when he thought of all the horrors he had experienced during his wanderings, when he shudderingly remembered how the boa-constrictor had flung itself down from the tree upon the tiger, and how he had heard the bones of the animal crashing and crushing in the enormous folds of the reptile, he dared not incur the chance of becoming the victim of so horrible a doom. His decision was therefore taken in favour of a continued residence at the cavern.

The remainder of that day passed without any incident worthy of importance, and when the sun was sinking toward its western couch, the Burker began to prepare his barricade as usual. The night went by without producing any subject for alarm, though for the first several hours the man could not close his eyes in slumber. At length sleep stole upon him, induced by a drowsiness which he could not possibly shake off, and he slumbered on until he was awakened by the sounds of a strange music resembling that of a flageolet, but with harsher and more discordant notes.

The beams of morning were penetrating through the interstices of the barrier at the mouth of the cavern, and the Burker, starting up, rubbed his eyes, at the same time fancying that he had heard the music only in a dream. But no, the sounds still continued, and hastening to remove some of the upper stones of the barrier, the Burker beheld a spectacle which for a moment filled him with joy, and the next instant struck him with unspeakable horror.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ITINERANTS — THE COBRA

At a little distance from the cavern, several Hindu natives, male and female, were seated upon the grass. They were in number perhaps a dozen, and it was the sight of these human beings which inspired the man with his first feeling of joy. But a little apart from the group sat a hideous-looking old Hindu, with half a dozen cobra di capellos dancing in front of him. Behind him stood a younger man, who was playing on the pipe, or flageolet, to the music of which the hideous reptiles were thus disporting. All of a sudden the old man caught up a snake in each hand, and suffered the reptiles to coil themselves up his arms; then he took up two more, which he placed around his neck; and the remaining two he encouraged to twist themselves about his legs. The hoods of the serpents were expanded, but all the time that they twirled and coiled and twisted about the man's half-naked form their heads and necks sustained a continuous oscillating motion, evidently in obedience to the influence of the music. It was this spectacle which so speedily turned the Burker's first feeling of joy into a cold, shuddering horror.

Averting his eyes from that portion of the scene, he examined more attentively the other persons belonging to the group. They consisted of young men and women, all the latter being of an exceeding beauty. These females were dressed in short white skirts, and they had bands of linen over the bosom and passing around the back, but the interval between these slight zones, or corsets, and the skirts themselves, was left entirely bare. Their limbs were modelled to the most admirable symmetry; they were nearly all of tall figure, and their shapes were faultless. The linen bands over the bosom were so arranged, by crossing each other

in the middle of the chest, to give the full rounded development to the bust itself, and in this particular they were as well formed as in their general symmetry. They were near enough for the Burker to distinguish the lustre of their fine dark eyes, as well as the pearly whiteness of the teeth that shone between the rich lips like white seeds in the midst of a fruit of luscious redness. They were lounging in voluptuous attitudes upon the grass, laughing and chatting gaily with their male companions, and now and then bestowing a look upon the old man who was exhibiting his feats with the reptiles. But to those beholders the feats themselves were evidently no novelty, and therefore the Burker imagined that the snake-charmers and the dancers all belonged to one party, and that the former (that old man and the young one with the flageolet) were merely practising their performances. That these girls and their male companions were itinerant dancers the Burker had no doubt, for he had seen such parties before, during his journey from Calcutta to Inderabad.

That the itinerants would prove friendly disposed toward him he had sufficient hope, but that they at present suspected there was any looker-on at their proceedings he had no reason to fancy. He was about to throw down the barrier and reveal himself, when the dancers, as if with one accord, all started up and began to practise their own special performances. The Burker thought that he would wait until they had finished, and he accordingly remained a still unseen spectator of all that was progressing.

The dance began, slowly at first, the girls evidently practising the most voluptuous movements of their forms. Nothing could be more sensual than their attitudes and their movements, which they made their countenances, especially the eyes, follow as it were with a kindred expression. The young men who danced with them imitated them in these respects, for nothing can exceed the licentiousness of these dances on the part of those professional itinerants in Hindustan.

At length the dance was concluded, and the performers threw themselves in voluptuous languor upon the grass; but still the old man continued his feats with the serpents, while the younger one sustained the strange discordant music of the flageolet. The Burker was now upon the point of throwing down the barricade and revealing himself to

the itinerants, when all of a sudden a terrific howl, or, rather, ferocious yell, burst upon every ear, and forth from an adjacent thicket darted an enormous tiger, apparently leaping with a single bound for at least a dozen yards. With the wildest shrieks the women sprang to their feet, while fearful cries of horror and alarm pealed from the lips of the men. Flight became general, with the single exception of the old snake-charmer, for it was upon him that the tiger pounced with that terrific bound which it made. Encircled as he was with the twisting snakes, was he thus seized by the ravenous animal, and borne off, yelling fearfully, into the thicket whence the brute had emerged. The Burker sank down in his cavern, horrified at this scene, but in a few moments the evidences of the old man's agony ceased, death had no doubt put a termination to his frightful sufferings, and he was feeding the bloodthirsty maw of the tiger.

But when the Burker ventured to peep forth again from his hiding-place, not a human form was to be seen; the dancers and the flageolet-player had all vanished. Maddened and desperate at having lost this chance of being guided forth from that dreadful wilderness, the Burker hurled down his barricade and rushed out, in the hope of distinguishing the forms of the fugitives, in whatsoever direction they had taken. But he beheld them not, and throwing himself upon the ground, he beat his breast and tore his hair with mingled rage and disappointment. Heaven itself seemed to be warring against him. If he beheld human beings in that jungle, it was first in the form of travellers who were to be assassinated before his eyes, then in the form of Stranglers seeking his own life, or in the shape of wandering dervishes who would have no communion with him, and lastly, when there appeared to be every prospect of falling in with friendly disposed persons, the jungle vomited forth one of its most dreadful monsters to scare them away. No wonder that the wretched man should fling himself upon the ground, and lie writhing and convulsing there with a mental anguish as terrible as if he were enduring the agonies of death.

But after awhile the fury of his enraged disappointment abated, and he rose up from the ground. He now looked about him on the spot whence the itinerants had disappeared, and no trace of their recent presence did he behold except

a small box and a wicker basket close by the place where the old snake-charmer had been seated. Remembering now that hideous spectacle of the cobras which had filled him with so much horror, the Burker was struck aghast with the idea that those reptiles had doubtless uncoiled themselves and escaped amidst the thicket into which the old Hindu was carried off by the tiger. In what frightful proximity, therefore, were these serpents now to him and to his abiding-place! The tiger too might still be lurking there, and at any moment he himself might become the animal's victim. But so desperate was his position that he became nerved as it were with a sullen, moody recklessness, and gradually the idea crept into his mind that those cobras which he had seen dancing must have been deprived of their venomed fangs expressly for those performances. The Burker proceeded to open the box, which he found to contain a quantity of provisions, chiefly cold boiled rice. The basket was empty, and he had no doubt it was a receptacle for the snakes which had belonged to the unfortunate old charmer. He conveyed the box of provisions to his cavern, and at the next meal that he made he consumed the last of the spirits which remained in the gourd.

The sullen desperation of his mood having abated, or rather, we should say, given place to a returning carefulness for his life, he began to think of erecting his barricade once more, even though it were only the forenoon of the day, in order to guard against an attack on the part of the tiger. But how was it possible for him to remain shut up day and night within that cavern? No, he felt that with such imprisonment he should go mad; he therefore resolved upon running any risk rather than dooming himself to such a tomblike immurement. Besides, every now and then he required to slake his thirst at the spring which welled forth from behind the rocky hill into the bowels of which the cavern penetrated. He could not therefore shut himself up altogether in the cave itself.

Several hours passed; the sun had gone considerably beyond its meridian, when, as the Burker was standing on the top of the rocky hill, anxiously straining his eyes in the hope of discerning some human form in the distance, he was startled by a terrific rushing din on the side of a grove of tall trees about two hundred yards off. From that wood

emerged at least forty or fifty elephants, speeding onwards as if goaded by some frightful apprehension that had taken possession of them all. The Burker was transfixed to the spot with terror at this spectacle. Some of the elephants were of immense size, but notwithstanding the unwieldiness of their bulky forms, they rushed on with remarkable speed, flourishing their trunks and sending forth the strangest sounds.

This herd of wild elephants seemed to be making straight for the very hill upon which the Burker was posted. On they came, trampling down the long grass, the brakes, and the thickets, in the midst of which all the lower parts of their huge uncouth forms were buried, and at length the Burker, galvanized into the sudden power of motion from his transfixed state of horrible alarm, was preparing to fly. But all in a moment he beheld the herd of elephants halt; those which were foremost turned around, and they all seemed to commence an attack upon some enemy that was in their midst. Full soon the Burker became aware what sort of an enemy this was, for the terrific howls of a tiger came pealing upon his ear. He looked on with indescribable suspense where that strange and fearful scene was taking place. The elephants exhibited a rage and desperation which were only proportionate with the enormous peril against which they were combating. The conflict however lasted not many minutes, for all of a sudden an object was whirled up into the air, and the Burker could distinguish the tiger as it thus for an instant turned around with its lithe, supple form, ere with a hideous yell it fell down again amidst its enemies. And now the Burker could see the elephants rush in upon it, and by their movements he knew that they were trampling it underfoot. For a few moments its howls lasted, full of mortal agony, and growing fainter and fainter until they ceased altogether. Then away sped the elephants, the whole herd appearing to follow one that acted as its leader. Through the wilds of the jungle went those unwieldy brutes with an astonishing degree of speed, until the wood hid them from the Burker's view.

He now began to breathe freely, as he sat down on the top of the rocky hill to rest after the exhausting effect which the tension of his feelings produced upon his physical being. But he began to reflect that he might have some reason to

congratulate himself on the spectacle he had just witnessed, for it was probably the tiger which had carried off the snake-charmer that had thus met its death amidst the infuriate elephants. At all events there was one wild beast the less in the vicinity of the cavern, and such a circumstance was a subject for self-felicitation on the part of the Burker. He remained for some while seated on the top of the hill, and then, having again slaked his thirst with the gushing waters of the pellucid spring, he passed around the rocky eminence in order to reach the entrance of his cavern, that he might partake of his evening meal. Having eaten of his provisions, he felt an exceeding drowsiness stealing upon him, most probably from having remained so long upon the eminence exposed to the sultry fervour of the sun. So strong became this inclination to sleep that he could not battle against it, and yet he knew that the projecting barrier was not raised at the mouth of the cavern. After a vain effort to shake off the increasing somnolence, the Burker yielded himself to it, and falling back on the ground of the cave, he sank into sleep.

Horrible dreams speedily began to troop in unto his mind; a hideous nightmare seized upon him, and he felt an oppression upon the chest that it appeared as if the hand of death itself were thus lying heavily on him. Never had his visions been so horrible before, frightful though many of his dreaming experiences had been beneath the roof of that very cavern. How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly startled up into complete wakefulness, and then a monstrous cobra upreared its hooded head from his breast and hissed at him. The man shrieked out in his mental agony; the cobra darted his head forward as if to seize him on the face with its fangs, and the Burker sank back insensible.

When he came back to consciousness, he shuddered with the awful recollection of what he had endured, and which now appeared to be a hideous dream. The dusk was closing in, and he started up to his feet, mechanically clutching his club which lay by his side. Still trembling and quivering all over under the influence of his hideous recollections, with the perspiration standing cold and clammy upon his forehead, the Burker was rushing out of the cavern, when a horrible hissing smote his ears, and within a yard of his foot

the monstrous cobra raised itself up to dart at him. He sprang back, at the same instant hurling his club at the reptile. The blow was well aimed; it struck down the cobra, which lay writhing upon the bed of granite in front of the cavern. With a stone, hastily snatched up, the Burker despatched his enemy.

It was no vision, then, which had haunted him during his slumber, it was a terrific reality, and he had slept with a cobra upon his breast! The man's form kept convulsing and shuddering with nervous horror at the bare idea. Indeed, many minutes elapsed ere he could regain sufficient self-possession for deliberate thought. Then the reflection began to creep into his mind that the cobra he had just destroyed must be one of those that he had seen with the snake-charmer, and that his notion of the morning was correct, namely, that its fangs had been withdrawn. For if this were not the case, how could he possibly have escaped with his life? But the incident made the Burker aware of one thing, which was that his mat of granite fragments in front of the cavern was not a complete protection against the intrusion of reptiles.

He had now therefore scarcely any heart to take the trouble of building up the barricade at the mouth of his cave. He felt as if he could lay himself down and die, — as if it were impossible to bear up any longer against the accumulating horrors of his position. He was utterly desponding. But still death came not to his call, though he was most painfully conscious of how it might seek him unawares, stealthily and insidiously, by the hand of a Strangler, or violently and abruptly, by the jaws of a tiger. He therefore mustered up resolution sufficient for the formation of his barricade, and when the task was accomplished, he sat down in the deepest dejection, in the darkness of his abiding-place.

The night passed without any incident worthy of notice, and when the Burker issued from the cave in the morning, he ascended the little eminence, as was his wont, to ascertain if he could descry any human form in the neighbourhood. He had not been stationed there many minutes ere he beheld some one advancing through the jungle, and as the person drew nearer, the Burker perceived that he was a gossoon. The man's heart leaped for joy as he thought that now at last deliverance from that dreadful wilderness

was at hand, for he resolved that if the dervish, imitating the example of his predecessors, should refuse him his guidance, he would compel him by violence to succour him in that sense, or else would pertinaciously dog his footsteps and thus be led from the jungle. As the gossoon drew nearer still, the Burker discerned that he was one of the lowest of the sect of religious itinerants, — in fact, a wandering beggar, dependent on the alms of charity. These facts his garb and general appearance announced, while his looks were of the most forbidding character. He was about fifty years of age; his hair and beard were grizzled, and he had a strong cast in one eye, which added to his sinister aspect.

The gossoon seemed surprised for a few moments on beholding an European there, but the Burker, deeming it the most prudent course to assume a demeanour of entreaty, descended from the top of the hillock and made signs to implore the gossoon to lead him forth from the jungle. The itinerant religionist made some sign of impatience in reply, and at once proceeded to the cave. There he looked in the niche underneath the loophole, and on discovering the Burker's knapsack, he opened it. An expression of delight appeared on his sinister features on finding a provision of boiled rice inside, and coming forth to the entrance of the cavern, he sat himself down to partake of the food. He ate it in a manner so ravenous as to indicate that his fast must have been a long one, and the Burker, thinking to do him a pleasure, took up the gourd, at the same time intimating by a sign that he would go and fill it with water. The gossoon did not, however, appear to take any notice of him, so busied was he in cramming the cold boiled rice down his throat. The Burker hastened to fill the gourd at the spring which welled forth behind the rocky hill, and returning to the gossoon, he presented it to him. But the dervish, with a growl as savage and as sullen as if it came from the throat of a wild beast, repulsed the gourd so rudely that it dropped from the Burker's hand; and then the gossoon, taking a small flask from the folds of his garments, drained its contents, whatever they were, to the very bottom. Having done this, and without taking any more notice of the Burker, he rose, entered the cavern, threw himself lazily down, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

For a moment the Burker was deeply incensed at the

rough, uncouth manner in which his gourd had been rejected, and he could not help thinking likewise that in return for his civility the gossoon might have spared him a drop of the contents of his flask. He did not, however, make any demonstration of his anger; he thought it better to let the brutal Hindu enjoy the slumber of which he might possibly find himself in great need after a toilsome journey, and the Burker consoled himself with the hope that when the gossoon should wake up, the time for his deliverance from the depths of that horrible jungle would be at hand.

Hours passed; still the gossoon slept on, and still the Burker sat at the entrance of the cavern, anxiously awaiting the moment when the Hindu should arouse himself. All the rice was gone from the knapsack, for the gossoon had made light work of the provision which it contained. This was, however, scarcely a source of uneasiness to the Burker for the present, for he felt assured that his strange companion must have the consciousness of being speedily enabled to procure another supply. And while thus reflecting, the Burker buoyed himself up with the hope that probably they were not so far from the extremity of the jungle as he had previously imagined, or that the gossoon was acquainted with some outlet that would speedily take them to an inhabited spot.

But time passed on, the day was wearing away, and still the gossoon slept. The Burker might have supposed that the man was dead, were it not for the unmistakable indications of life which the nasal sounds of his slumber gave forth. Though looking to that dervish as the means by which he hoped to escape from the jungle, the Burker nevertheless hated him, not so much for his uncouth conduct as for this procrastination of the journey which he expected to enter upon under his guidance.

For that entire day did the Burker remain sitting in front of the cavern, with the exception of two or three temporary absences to slake his thirst at the spring; and as the sun drew nearer and nearer to the western horizon, the impatience of the Burker grew into a perfect rage. Oh, how he hated that gossoon! In what bitter aversion did he hold him! He could have even killed him, so tremendous at length grew his vexation and his spite when he beheld

him continuing to enjoy a slumber so profound that it appeared as if it never could have a waking.

At length the Burker, utterly bereft of all patience, was about to lay his hand on the gossoon's shoulder and shake him with an enraged violence that would speedily dispel his slumber, when the dervish suddenly started up to a sitting posture. He rubbed his eyes, looked at the Burker with a certain air of astonishment as if having totally forgotten that he had seen such a person in that place before, and then springing up, he hastened to inspect the niche underneath the loophole. But there was no food in it, and the gossoon gave such a hideous howl of rage that the Burker was for an instant frightened lest the sound proceeded from the throat of some wild animal in the immediate neighbourhood. The gossoon advanced toward the Burker, making threatening signs, pointing to the vacant niche and the empty knapsack, as much as to accuse him of having devoured the provisions which ought to be there. The Burker's temper, never the sweetest at any time, was particularly ruffled by the entire conduct of the gossoon, and forgetting his conciliatory policy, he replied by signs that were irate and menacing. A terrific expression of rage swept over the gossoon's countenance, and suddenly seizing the Burker with both arms around the body, he lifted him up and dashed him down upon the granite blocks which lay close by the mouth of the cavern.

Herculean was the strength of the gossoon, — a strength, too, that was exercised with a skill and expertness which made the achievement the work of a single instant. Powerless as a dwarf in the hands of a giant, and taken completely unawares, the Burker was utterly unable to offer any resistance, so that with lightning rapidity did he find himself thus thrown, half-stunned, upon the granite blocks. There he lay for a few instants, and as he slowly picked himself up, it was in the most sombre sullenness of mood that he submitted to this treatment without an effort to avenge it. For in the midst of the concentrated rage and vindictive spite which filled his soul, was the consciousness that even if he had the power to slay the gossoon, it would be an act of madness, thereby cutting off this last remaining chance of escape from the jungle. For the same reason, too, he doggedly resolved to return to his conciliatory policy toward

the man on whom he felt himself to be so completely dependent.

The gossoon surveyed him with a kind of sombre contempt as he slowly raised himself to his feet, and then he grinned with a horrible satisfaction, as if contented with having shown the European that he was his master. That he was well acquainted with the cave the Burker had already perceived, from the fact of his searching the niche so promptly after his arrival; and another proof thereof was now furnished by the circumstance that the gossoon passed around to the back of the well to drink of the water. The sun was by this time beginning to set, and the Burker therefore knew that it was useless to think of setting out upon a journey through the jungle during the hours of the night. He made a sign to the gossoon to the effect that he would pile up the stones at the mouth of the cavern, but the itinerant dervish burst out into a scornful laugh, as if ridiculing such a precaution or means of defence. He set to work to gather together a quantity of dried wood, and he made a sign to the Burker to imitate his example. Fearlessly the gossoon plunged into the long grass in the thicket, and tore down some branches of the most resinous trees. When an immense quantity of fuel was thus collected, the gossoon arranged it in the form of a semicircle near the front of the cave, and churlishly motioning the Burker to follow him within the rampart, he set fire to it by the means of ignition which he carried about his person. He then threw himself down in the cavern, and composing himself to sleep, was soon wrapped once more in a slumber as profound as that which throughout the livelong day he had enjoyed.

But the Burker could not sleep. He was half-famished with hunger; he trembled lest the Strangler should insidiously work his way, despite the fire, into the cave; he was afraid likewise of the repulsive gossoon who lay snoring at a little distance. Perhaps the wretch, thought the Burker, was only pretending to be asleep, in order to watch an opportunity of taking his life, — though he certainly could not see of what avail such a proceeding would be to the Hindu. The fire continued to burn steadily for a long time, and as there was no wind, but the night air was still and stagnant, the smoke beat not into the cavern, but ascended straight upward. At length a sensation of drowsiness began

to steal upon the Burker, and after several vain attempts to shake it off, he yielded to its influence. He fell asleep.

Horrible dreams haunted him, as usual, for the mind reproduced with added horror the waking thoughts of the wretched man, and now in imagination he beheld the dead Strangler's companion stealing upon him; he saw the hideous gossoon bending over him with a terrible ferocity of countenance, and with a long, sharp instrument in his hand. Then he fancied that he was in the depths of the jungle's wilds, pursued by a tiger, that he strove to fly, but that his feet became as heavy as if they had turned into lead, and he could not escape the ravenous animal that was every instant gaining upon him. But all of a sudden the subject of his visions changed, and he was writhing and convulsing in the huge folds of a boa-constrictor. With a shriek of agony he awoke.

He was lying in the cave; the duskiness of night still prevailed, the fire had sunk into a semicircular pile of smouldering embers, just throwing out light sufficient to show him the eyes of the gossoon staring wide open as the mendicant dervish still lay stretched along the floor of the cave at a little distance. In which direction the eye with the horrible squint was looking, the Burker scarcely knew, but the other was fixed upon himself with (he fancied) the gleaming malignity of a reptile's. Then the gossoon began convulsing and writhing, and all of a sudden he sent forth so wild a yell that it made the Burker literally bound up in horrible alarm, while the blood seemed to congeal in his veins. The gossoon burst out into a savage laugh, and made signs to show that he was only imitating everything that the Burker had just been doing. Deep but low was the curse which in his own vernacular the Burker gave as he found himself thus rendered the sport of the malignant mockery of that hated gossoon. But the mendicant Hindu continued to laugh for some moments, and it seemed to the Burker as if he were thus listening to the malice-mirth of a fiend.

When the gossoon had finished his hideous cachinnation, he composed himself to sleep again, but the Burker could not close his eyes in slumber any more. In a couple of hours the sun rose, the gossoon still slept and the Burker issued forth from the cavern.

CHAPTER XXV

THE GOSSOONS

Having slaked his thirst, which was poignant and most oppressive, for his parched lips were cracked with the fever-heat of his blood, and his tongue was as dry as if he had been swallowing some of the embers of the now extinct fire, the Burker was returning to the mouth of the cavern to await in hope the gossoon's awakening, when he espied another human form approaching from a little distance. This speedily proved to be a man of the same sect as the Hindu who had already become the Burker's companion. He was a mendicant gossoon more wretchedly clad if possible, more filthy in person, and more repulsive in his looks, than even the other. He was upwards of sixty years of age, and exceedingly tall, without any stoop, but with a frame so emaciated that it was painful to contemplate the parts which his rags left bare. He had a look half-savage, half-austere, and he growled upon the Burker as if regarding him as an intruder in that spot.

Without however taking any further notice of him, this old gossoon proceeded straight to the cavern, and the Burker, following, perceived that the other itinerant suddenly woke up, as if with the instinctive knowledge that an expected friend was at hand. Their greetings were, however, sullenly and moodily exchanged, and the newcomer almost immediately produced a bag which he carried hidden amongst his rags. Thence he took forth rice, fruits, and fragments of coarse barley bread, and the two gossoons began to eat with a ravenous appetite. The Burker, half-famished, advanced in a supplicating manner toward them, and then the younger gossoon began telling his comrade something which the Burker speedily understood to be a narrative

of the effects produced upon himself by the dreams of the past night. For that malignant gossoon again went through the imitation of the Burker's convulsive writhings, and he ended by giving vent to another mocking yell more hideous than even that by which he had so startled the English outcast a short while back. The elder gossoon laughed with a low, inward chuckling which was horrible to hear, and then he contemptuously tossed the Burker a part of his provisions. The bag was a large one, and even when three people had partaken of its contents, enough provender evidently remained for three or four more meals of the same extent as this first one. But the old gossoon had brought with him no liquor, and the crystal spring accordingly supplied the means of washing down the food that was then partaken of.

When the repast was ended, the elder gossoon addressed in his own language some question to the Burker, but the latter by signs intimated that he was ignorant of what was thus said to him. It soon transpired that the gossoons themselves were equally at a loss to understand the Englishman, and the two itinerants accordingly conversed together, taking no further notice of the Burker. This individual waited with anxious suspense for some indication of their future plans or movements, but for three mortal hours they stirred not, and when their colloquy was ended, they stretched themselves down to sleep.

The rage and impatience which the wretched outcast had experienced on the preceding day were now excelled by the feelings which took possession of him when he saw those lazy vagabonds so tranquilly and unconcernedly compose themselves to slumber. But what could he do? He must bide their good-will and pleasure, and to the utmost of his power he must render himself agreeable to them, for fear lest they should leave him behind, as the other gossoons had done, on taking their departure. He therefore strove to assuage his boiling impatience, to appease his irritated feelings, and to sustain himself with the hope that the moment for egress from that dreadful jungle must come at last.

The gossoons slept on, and the sun was again sinking toward the western horizon before they awoke. Then the provision-bag was again opened, and a ration was bestowed upon the Burker, though not to the same extent as that

which each gossoon took for himself. The meal being disposed of, they made signs for him to procure them water in the gourd, and then they intimated that he was to collect the firewood to be arranged at the mouth of the cavern. He comprehended that they were using him as their slave, but he was compelled to submit. It was however with shuddering horror that he plunged into the thickets to gather the branches, but the task was achieved without any circumstance calculated to justify his alarm. The pile was built up; the three passed into the cavern, and the wood was lighted. The two gossoons were speedily buried in profoundest slumber, and the Burker, worn out in mind and body, fell asleep more quickly than on the preceding night. His dreams were again horrible, but not characterized by the same evidences of distress on his part as those which we have described; or at least if they were, he himself awoke in ignorance of the fact, and at all events the gossoons did not seem to have been disturbed. These itinerants did not awake until some while after sunrise; then the provision-bag was produced, the Burker filled the gourd from the spring, and the morning meal was partaken of. Afterward the two gossoons ascended the hillock, and both looked intently in the same direction from which they themselves had respectively come, as if they were awaiting another arrival. The Burker began to fear that if the company of gossoons were increased he might be abandoned by them, as he was by those who had taken away the dead body with them, and painful misgivings agitated in the wretched man's soul. That day passed like the preceding one, the gossoons sleeping for hours together, the Burker watching at the mouth of the cavern, and having to collect the firewood in the evening. No other gossoon made his appearance, there was no fresh arrival of any kind, and another night was passed in the cavern.

Again, in the morning, when the meal had been partaken of, — and which meal completely emptied the bag, — the two gossoons ascended the hillock, the Burker following them. No newcomer was to be seen, and there the gossoons sat, watching in silence for a couple of hours until the heat of the sun became intolerable with its sultriness. Then the dervishes gave vent to ejaculations of mingled rage, astonishment, and disappointment, and the Burker had no

difficulty in comprehending the cause. They evidently expected some person or persons, who however came not. They descended into the cavern, and stretched themselves to slumber, the Burker taking his accustomed post just within the entrance, so as to shade himself against the piercing rays of the sun. It was evening when the gossoons awoke, and then they both hastened with avidity to inspect the niche under the loophole, but there were no provisions there. They made impatient signs to the Burker to inquire whether any one had been, and on his signalling a negative, they looked as if they were very much inclined to wreak their rage upon himself. It was indeed with a sort of menacing peremptoriness that they pointed to the thicket as an intimation that he should gather the firewood, and he hastened to obey, for he was now more than ever afraid of these men. His fears in that respect so operated upon his mind as to enhance the poignancy of the apprehensions with which he set foot in the thicket, the lurking-place of the reptile, and which had likewise recently proved the ambush of the tiger. While treading amidst the long grass, he fancied that cobras were coiling up his legs, and the ice-chill of terror struck to the very marrow of his bones. Upon those bones, too, did the flesh appear to creep, as he approached the trees from which he had to tear away the branches, — those trees whence the fatal coils of the boa-constrictor might possibly unwind to fling down its huge, slimy length and envelop his form. But his task was achieved without the occurrence of any of these terrible casualties, and he set to work to pile up the wood in front of the cavern.

Whether it were that he was not quick enough in his movements to please the elder gossoon, or that this individual required some object on whom to wreak the vindictive spite with which hunger filled him, we cannot say, but certain it is that, with an ejaculation of rage, he snatched up a stout branch and dealt the Burker a savage blow upon the head. In a moment the Englishman flew like a tiger at the Hindu, but the latter, suddenly skipping aside, caught the Burker around the waist, just as the other gossoon had done, and hurled him to a distance with as much ease as if he were merely thus tossing away from him an infant child. Again was the Burker compelled to put up with the rough treatment so sustained, and he had a severe experience that the

strength of the elder gossoon, emaciated a wretch though he were, was in no way inferior to that of his younger companion. Both were his masters, and seemed resolved to prove themselves so. In a mood of sullen resignation and dogged submission did the Burker continue his task, and when it was completed he and the two gossoons stretched themselves supperless to repose. The itinerants speedily slept, but the cravings of hunger kept the Burker awake for the greater part of the night. At length sleep visited his eyes also, and if his dreams were less horrible than usual, it was perhaps because he had all the less to tax or trouble his digestive organs.

In the morning the gossoons again ascended to the top of the hill, again too followed by the Burker, who was as much interested as themselves in the arrival of any one bearing a supply of provisions. But no approaching form was to be seen. Crashing through the jungle at a little distance was that phenomenon, a white elephant, called an albino; but it was speedily lost to the view, and the straining eyes of the two gossoons and the Burker were again riveted in the direction whence the former evidently expected an arrival. And now, the Burker's ideas changing, he began to hope that no one would come after all, for in this case he saw the necessity of the gossoons leaving the cavern and betaking themselves to the nearest inhabited spot where provisions might be procured, — in which case he was resolved to accompany or to dog them, unless overpowered by their superior brute force.

All of a sudden, however, ejaculations of joy burst from the lips of the gossoons, for they, with eyes more accustomed to mark the movements of human beings in their own native land than the Burker's could possibly be, beheld some one advancing. In a short time the Burker himself discerned the form which came hastening along with light step, for the expected individual was quite young. He likewise was a gossoon, not above two or three and twenty years of age, and he was as remarkable for his personal beauty as those whom he came to join were for their ugliness. He was of the medium stature, slender and well made, with a faultless aquiline profile, and superb eyes. He was attired with somewhat more neatness than the other gossoons, but still in a poor style, and his person displayed more cleanly habits.

He had at his back a wallet, or knapsack, of considerable size; he advanced rapidly, and soon joined the gossoons and the Burker, who descended from the top of the hillock.

When the newcomer cast a look of wondering inquiry upon the Burker, the gossoon who had first of all arrived at the cavern gave a few hasty words of explanation, as the object of the remarks could understand, while the eldest gossoon, with hands of greedy impatience and ravenous looks, began to take off the knapsack from the newcomer's shoulders. On being opened, it was found to contain a quantity of provisions of a better sort than any the Burker had as yet seen in the jungle. There were not only rice and fruits, but cakes of bread and pieces of cold meat, and the gossoons quickly sat down to the welcome meal. The Burker was liberally treated in respect to the food on the present occasion, and when the flask which the young gossoon produced had passed around from his own lips to those of his friends, the Burker was not forgotten. He found it to contain the same sort of potent spirit as that which the gourd of the assassinated travellers had furnished him, and, encouraged by the apparent friendliness of the gossoons, he imbibed a deep draught.

The meal being over, the gossoons proceeded to stretch themselves to sleep in the cavern, the handsome young newcomer following in this respect the example of his ugly elder comrades. The Burker experienced the soporific effect of the potent alcohol, and yielding to drowsiness, he likewise laid himself down in the cave. Slumber soon stole upon his eyes, and when he awoke the sun was considerably past the meridian. But the gossoons, where were they? They were not to be seen!

Half-wild with despair, the Burker ascended to the top of the rocky hill; but no, not a glimpse of them could he obtain. They had evidently abandoned him to his fate in that horrible wilderness. He cried aloud in his anguish; he mingled lamentations with imprecations; he beat his breast, tore his hair, and dashed his clenched fists violently against his brow. At length his rage began to moderate, even if his distress of mind were not alleviated. He saw that it was useless to trust to travelling gossoons as guides from the depths of that jungle, and despite all dangers, he would make one more desperate effort to issue thence, or die in the

attempt. He bethought himself that all three of the gossoons had come from precisely the same direction, and it was altogether in an opposite direction that his own former attempts had been made to issue from the jungle. Surely those men must have journeyed from a village or hamlet at no great distance? At all events he was determined to push forward in that direction, for sooner than endure the prolonged horrors of the jungle, he would dare all its ghastliest, frightfulest perils.

Having slaked his thirst at the crystal spring, and armed with his stout bludgeon, the Burker set out upon his journey. He strove to call to his aid all his most stubborn courage and dogged resolution. When floundering through the long grass where reptiles might lurk, he said to himself that it was better to die by the bite of the cobra than to endure the long agony of terror, with the prospect of famine, in the cave which he had just left. When forced by the circumstances of his route to pass near a tree, he strove to persuade himself that it were better to render up existence in the crushing folds of the boa-constrictor than to linger out that life in the awful solitude of the cavern. Or again, when passing near a stream, he thought it were preferable to risk being devoured by the jaws of an alligator than to continue to be whirled onward by a hurricane of agonizing alarms and a sense of excruciating perils. It was in this manner the wandering outcast endeavoured to sustain his spirits; but, oh, how desperate must he have felt his case to be when it admitted of such horrible consolations!

For about two hours had he advanced, steadily pursuing the direction from which the gossoons had come, when on emerging upon a sward of short, sweet grass, he beheld a dark object lying at a little distance. On approaching it, he found to his surprise that it was the wallet which the youngest gossoon had brought with him in the morning. On opening it, the Burker found that it contained a considerable quantity of the provender with which it was crammed when first produced, and his wonder was now succeeded by joy. But surprise was soon uppermost again, and this became blended with terror likewise, for how could the wallet be there unless something had happened to the young gossoon himself? And if he had become a prey to a wild beast, might not that same ferocious animal be still lurking in the

neighbourhood? The Burker now discerned upon the grass the traces of footsteps, and, oh, with what curdling of the blood did he likewise distinguish the spots where the paws of a wild beast, most probably a tiger, had been!

Some minutes elapsed before he could sufficiently compose himself to appropriate the wallet and strap it over his shoulders. He then continued his way, looking around him with cold, shuddering apprehension, when his foot kicked against something, and recoiling from the contact, he perceived that it was a human bone. Several other bones lay scattered about, and there was a dark stain upon the ground which confirmed all the dreadful tale. It was a horrible spectacle. Horrible would it have been even for one surveying it with a consciousness of perfect security, but infinitely more horrible for one who felt that at any instant he might share the fate of his predecessor on that spot. Close by, too, there were the fragments of apparel; and now the Burker knew, beyond the possibility of doubt, that it was the young gossoon who had been devoured by a wild beast.

He rushed on, almost maddened with horror, from the spot. He forgot the Strangler, the boa-constrictor, the cobra, the panther, the elephant, and the alligator; he thought of nothing but the tiger. But when another hour had elapsed, and he had continued his way without any fresh alarm, his spirits began to revive somewhat. That the two elder gossoons had fled from the spot where their more juvenile comrade met so hideous a fate was tolerably evident. Might he not therefore overtake them, and if so, might he not induce them to serve as his guides, or, in any case, might he not follow them from a distance?

While he was looking straight before him, with straining eyes, to see if he could discern any human forms moving in the distance, he fancied that his ear caught the sounds of plaintive moans in his immediate vicinage. He stopped and listened. Yes, it was assuredly so, and they appeared to emanate from the foot of a tree about twenty yards off. This tree was completely withered; there was not a single leaf upon it, and thus the eye of the Burker could easily scan all its skeleton branches. No boa-constrictor was coiled there, and a horrible feeling of curiosity, surmounting his alarms, led him to draw nearer and nearer by slow degrees

toward the foot of that blasted tree. For the moans still continued to reach his ears, and though disguised as it were by their very plaintiveness, yet had he the conviction that they came from a human tongue. All of a sudden the thicket through which he was advancing ceased, and then a frightful spectacle met his eyes. For there, at the foot of the tree, lay the oldest of the three gossoons, encircled in the folds of a boa-constrictor, whose tail was coiled around the lower part of that tree's trunk. The reptile raised its head on beholding the Burker, who did not however remain there another instant to contemplate more of that scene of stupendous horror, but he fled, goaded by the agonizing apprehension that the snake might quit its hold upon the gossoon and mark himself as its prey instead. On he ran, until, breathless and exhausted, he reached a rocky eminence, and on the slope he threw himself down. There he lay for some minutes, until his presence of mind began to return, and he reflected with shuddering horror upon what he had seen. Two of the gossoons had met a hideous fate. Had the third escaped, or was he likewise doomed to perish in the jungle, to the perils of which he as well as they had abandoned a fellow creature? And would the Burker himself issue with his life from that wilderness of dangers, that wild and awful district where death was to be confronted in so many ghastly, frightful, and appalling shapes?

The Burker sat in a desponding mood, asking himself these questions, and reflecting on all these things, when it struck him that he heard a slight rustling sound higher up behind; and starting with the idea that a reptile was gliding toward him, he just escaped the noose of a lasso which was thrown at his head. For there, upon that rocky eminence, stood the Strangler, the remaining companion of him whom the Burker had slain. With a cry of vindictive rage the Burker sprang up the slope, on the top of which the shark-teethed Hindu tarried to meet him.

Now for another battle, another conflict, another struggle, to which the only end that could be expected was the death of one of these mortal foes.

A glance showed the Burker that the Strangler had in his hands no other weapon than the lasso; a simultaneous glance made the Hindu aware that the Englishman had no visible weapon but his club. Yet neither knew whether

the other might not have a knife or dagger, or even a pistol, concealed about the person. With his club held up over his head, alike as a means of defence against the lasso, and to be in readiness to deal a terrific blow, the Burker rushed on to the combat. The Strangler stood firm, holding his cord in a peculiar manner, and as the Burker drew near, that lasso was thrown out with such sudden violence that the knot of the noose struck him upon the mouth. The blood gushed forth, and he was for an instant staggered, but maddened with pain, he made one bound toward his enemy. The Strangler darted aside, and gathered up his lasso with incredible rapidity for the purpose of using it again, but the Burker's club reached his left arm as a blow was dealt with all the energy of the infuriate Englishman. That arm fell crushed and powerless by the Strangler's side, but the right hand again threw forth the lasso, and again too with more or less effect. It struck the Burker in the middle of the forehead, with such violence as to make him reel even more than the former blow, and lightning appeared to gleam before his eyes. But again did he rush toward the Strangler, who however darted back, and the lasso was once more whistling through the air, its noose this time being thrown at the Burker's neck. It was a marvel that he avoided it, and yet he did. Then, at the same instant, he hurled his cudgel with all his might at the Strangler; it struck the Hindu a tremendous blow upon the face, and the wretch toppled over the side of the rock, which in that direction was precipitous.

The Burker looked down into the abyss of about thirty feet in depth, and there he beheld the Strangler darting away, for, to the Englishman's astonishment, his opponent had evidently alighted on his feet. The lasso, having fallen from the Strangler's hand, lay upon the top of the rock, and it was now evident that the Hindu miscreant himself had experienced enough of the conflict for the present occasion. He was flying, and the Burker remained a victor upon the battle-ground.

At a very little distance a broad stream was rolling, and the thought struck the Burker that he would pursue his enemy and despatch him altogether. That river appeared to bar the Strangler's progress, for how could he swim across it with the use only of his right arm? And the

stream made so sweeping a curve likewise that if the Strangler followed its course along its bank, either to the right hand or to the left, it would bring him again in close proximity to the rock, which now seemed to serve as a fortalice commanding the entire position; so that the Burker conceived that he had only to sally down on either side, according to circumstances, and cut off the Strangler's retreat.

All these ideas passed through the Burker's mind during the space of the few moments in which the Strangler was fleeing toward the river. Straight he went, neither diverging to the right nor to the left, straight to the centre of the arc formed by that bend of the stream. The weeds, the sedges, and the grass grew high upon the river's bank; through that margining fringe rushed the Strangler, so that the Burker now became suddenly convinced that his foe did really intend to pass it by swimming, or by fording it, if it were indeed fordable. An imprecation burst from the Englishman's lips at the idea that the Hindu would after all escape him.

But what is that dark object which suddenly appears amongst the weeds and sedges? The Strangler turns to retrace his way; that object is close behind him, its whole form is now developed, — it is a tremendous alligator!

The Hindu no longer flies in a straight direction; he turns around and around, describing small circles, so as to avoid the long jaws of the unwieldy monster, which turns likewise. It is a scene of horrible excitement for the Burker, who beholds it all from the summit of that rock. For upwards of ten minutes does the spectacle, as strange as it is frightful, endure, the Strangler describing those circles which constitute the charm by which only is his life safe, the monster perseveringly turning and turning likewise, but unable to clutch the man in its vast gaping jaws. All in a moment the Strangler disappears from the Burker's view; he has either fallen through giddiness or terror or exhaustion, or he has tripped over something. The alligator makes one forward movement, he lifts his head up, the Strangler is lying crosswise in his jaws!

Horrible as this incident was, it only for the instant produced one effect upon the Burker, namely, that of a savage satisfaction to find that he was rid of his remaining enemy. Soon, however, the feeling stole over him that he himself

might be destined to feed a maw as ravenous as that which had just devoured his treacherous foe, and again, for the thousandth time since he first became a wanderer amidst the wilds of that jungle, did a cold shudder sweep through his entire frame. His eyes were still riveted upon the river's bank, and he beheld the alligator plunge into the water.

The Burker now pursued his way. He walked rapidly, for he had collected all his energies for this last attempt to find an egress from the jungle. To his delight he found that his path became more easy, that he could proceed for long intervals without being compelled to plunge into thickets, or drag his feet through the rank luxuriance of herbage where reptiles might lurk. The high trees, too, were fewer and farther between, and remembering how insensibly, as it were, the jungle commenced, he began to flatter himself with the hope that it was now drawing to an end, — gradually losing its wildness and its horrors as it merged into the cultivated parts of the country that lay beyond.

As he was proceeding, he suddenly beheld a human form at a little distance, and quickening his pace, he soon acquired the certainty that it was the surviving gossoon who was toiling slowly along. Presently that itinerant looked around, and the Burker, with a heart leaping joyously, sped forward to join him, for there was no longer a doubt that he had at last reached the extremity of the jungle.

Welcome as is the sight of land to the storm-tossed mariner who without compass has been drifting hither and thither amidst the perils of the ocean, was the spectacle which now greeted the Burker's view. For in the horizon he beheld the outlines of buildings, and all the interval between the verge of the jungle and that town was occupied by cultivated lands. Here and there, too, a cottage appeared, and the wanderer felt as if he were entering upon the confines of civilization once more. The gossoon was waiting for him to come up. Be it remembered that this was the first of the three who had appeared at the cave, — the one whose inveterate habit of sleeping had so terribly irritated the Burker.

On approaching the gossoon, the Englishman perceived that his countenance was haggard and care-worn, and still

had a frightened look, as if the influence of the horrors which had happened hours back yet remained upon his mind. The itinerant quickly descried the well-furnished wallet slung at the Burker's back, and the expression of his countenance suddenly changed from care-worn haggardness to a selfish and rapacious satisfaction. He was about to make a spring at it, when the Burker, brandishing his club, menacingly made him a sign to keep off. The gossoon laughed with a leer of low cunning, as much as to imply that the Burker felt he was now in a situation to command; and then assuming a lugubrious aspect, he imitated the bound of a tiger. The Burker comprehended what he meant, nodded his head, pointed to the wallet, and then made a motion as if picking up something from the ground, thereby showing how he had found that wallet on the spot where its recent possessor had fed the maw of the tiger. Then the squinting dervish in his turn made another sign, walked slowly on, imitating the gait of the emaciated old gossoon, and all of a sudden halted, showing by rapid movements of his hand how the immense snake had darted forth upon that unfortunate comrade of his, and imitating likewise the wretch's writhings and convulsions when encircled by the folds of the serpent. The Burker nodded significantly, and made signs to show how he himself had seen the old gossoon fast locked in the deadly coils of the boa-constrictor. He likewise gave the gossoon to understand that when he beheld the wretch he was still alive and moaning plaintively. The dervish comprehended the Burker's meaning, and he gave vent to low, half-subdued howls and moans of lamentation, but whether they were real or affected, it was impossible for the Burker to conjecture. At length the gossoon made an end of his whining, and the Burker thought that he would now share his provisions with the itinerant, whom indeed he meant to make his companion, for, moneyless as he was, he did not exactly see how he was to live without some such aid. As for any future prospects, the Burker really had none, for such was his position that he was forced to abandon himself entirely to chance.

The gossoon seemed to treat with a sort of calm indifference the fact of the Burker producing the provisions from the wallet, and when they sat down together the itinerant began eating with a voracity that threatened to consume

its contents altogether, or at least as much of them as he could secure for his own special behoof. The Burker made a sign for him to be sparing with the provisions, but the gossoon pointed confidently in the direction of the town, as much as to imply that they could obtain an ample replenishment there. The Burker was well pleased with this tacit but perfectly intelligible announcement, and giving the rein to his appetite, he ate without further parsimony in respect to the provender. The wallet was thus completely emptied.

The gossoon now began making signs to intimate that the Burker should become his companion, a proposition which the ruffian received with so much veritable joy that it betrayed to the dervish his consciousness of how helpless he would be if left to himself. Thereupon the gossoon nodded in a patronizing manner, and seemed to be seeking to give him to understand that he would take him under his protection. But snatching up the Burker's cudgel, he hurled it to a distance, and then he made signs to show that he considered himself and the Englishman to be upon equal terms. The Burker growlingly muttered an imprecation, but remembering the evidence of superior strength which the gossoon had given him at the cave, he thought it better to submit to these terms of equality on which the incident had just placed them.

The gossoon now rose and pointed toward the town; the Burker, likewise rising to his feet, prepared to accompany him. They journeyed on in silence, and the Englishman had thus ample leisure to give free scope to his reflections. Comparatively a few hours had sufficed to bring him from the cave to the extremity of the jungle, but on the former occasion of his endeavour to find an issue from the wilderness he had taken another direction, and had thus only floundered farther and farther into its depths. Whether he was still in the kingdom of Inderabad, he knew not, but he was very certain that when first entering the jungle, after his flight from imprisonment in the capital city of that kingdom, he had not passed through the region where he now found himself. When in the jungle, and exposed to all its horrors, he would cheerfully have fallen in with any of Queen Indora's emissaries who might have been sent in pursuit of him, but now that he was clear beyond

the limits of that awful wilderness, he entertained the precisely opposite feeling, and trembled at the thought of being recaptured and conducted back to Inderabad. Thus it was of some consequence to him to learn whether he was still within the range of Queen Indora's jurisdiction; but how could he possibly ascertain? — for no intelligible word could he exchange with the gossoon. Trusting therefore to some fortuitous circumstance to impart the intelligence which he required, he walked on with his companion.

In about an hour and a half, as the sun was sinking into its western bed, they reached the outskirts of the town, which was one of moderate size. As they entered the streets, the Burker looked about to see if there were any English soldiers or sepoys, such as he had seen in Calcutta and other places in Anglo-India through which he had passed when journeying as a prisoner in the suite of Queen Indora and her royal husband, but he beheld none of those indications of a British possession. The gossoon led him on through several streets, until they reached a small, low building consisting of two rooms, and which was a sort of charitable institution where wayfarers might rest themselves and cook their rice without having anything to pay for the accommodation. There were several other gossoons in this place, and to whom the Burker's companion was evidently well known. They had plenty of rice and other provisions, which they liberally shared with the newcomers. When the meal was over, the Burker's friend borrowed a few copper coins of the other gossoons, and he then beckoned the Englishman to accompany him. They went out together, and proceeded to a shop where articles of cutlery were sold. Here the gossoon purchased a couple of common rudely constructed knives, the blades of which were fixed in the handles dagger-shaped, so that indeed they resembled oyster-knives. A piece of cork was stuck on each point, and the gossoon, giving the Burker one, made a sign for him to secure it about his person. He then led the way back to the khan, or public accommodation-house, and there some of the other gossoons produced opium and strong spirits. The Burker partook of the latter, but refused the former; his companion however regaled on both, and after awhile the whole motley company stretched themselves to sleep on the benches in the inner room.

When the Burker awoke in the morning, he found that himself and his companion were the only two persons remaining in the place; the others had all gone forth on their respective avocations. No breakfast appeared to be forthcoming, and the gossoon made a sign to the Burker to follow him. As they passed by a shop where comestibles were sold, the gossoon pointed to the provisions, then to his own mouth and to that of the Burker, as much as to imply that some of that food should presently find its way into those avenues to the stomach. The Burker was cheered by this intimation, and he followed the gossoon, wondering to what proceedings he was about to address himself in order to procure the means to purchase the inviting provender. Presently the gossoon halted in a somewhat crowded thoroughfare, and placing his back against a dead wall, he made the Burker stand by his side. Then the gossoon, taking forth his knife, signalled the Burker to do the same, but to draw off the cork from the point. The Burker, watching the proceedings of his leader, hid the knife up his sleeve, and the gossoon began to appeal to the charity of the passers-by. At first it was in a whining tone of entreaty, then it was with howls and lamentations, and he kept nudging the Burker to imitate him. This the Englishman did to the best of his endeavour, and several persons, no doubt struck by the novelty of seeing a European in such a condition, stopped for a moment to contemplate him. But his was a countenance little calculated to excite sympathy; the townspeople therefore only shook their heads dubiously, and passed on their way.

The gossoon, seeing how matters were going, bent a look of rage upon the Burker, as if to reproach him for the failure of their appeal to the public charity. Nothing could exceed the villainous expression of the dervish's countenance as his infuriate feelings thus convulsed his features, and his squinting eye darted forth vivid lightnings. The Burker was actually terrified by his companion's aspect, and he went on howling, yelling, and lamenting more vociferously than ever.

Still, however, the passers-by seemed incredulous in respect to the claims of the gossoon and the Burker upon their charity, and thus about a couple of hours elapsed without a single coin being dropped into the outstretched hand of

either. That period of the day was approaching when the streets would become deserted on account of the intense sultriness of the sun, and thus there appeared to be little chance, as matters now stood, for the gossoon and the Burker to obtain the wherewith for the purchase of a breakfast. Yet the gossoon had a resource left, but it was evidently one to which he only thought fit to address himself as a desperate alternative when the easier and more legitimate means of mendicity failed. He had his knife concealed in his sleeve; the Burker likewise had his weapon hidden up his own arm, and the gossoon made him a sign to draw it forth. The Burker hesitated, not understanding the object which the proceeding was to serve, but when he beheld the dervish draw forth his own knife, he followed the example. Then the gossoon went on howling, roaring, and yelling more terrifically than ever, the Burker doing his best to play his own part in the appalling chorus. All of a sudden the gossoon made him a sign to cut himself with his knife, and tearing open his own sleeve, he drew the blade, as if in perfect frenzy, along his arm. The Burker, by no means relishing the frantic example thus set him by the gossoon, muttered something in his special vernacular to the effect that he would see himself in the hottest place he could possibly think of before he would stick a knife into his own flesh. Quick as lightning, however, the gossoon tore up the Burker's sleeve, and stuck his knife into the fleshy part of the man's arm. The Burker, roaring with the pain, was on the very point of inflicting summary chastisement on the gossoon by plunging the knife into his heart, when a quantity of coins showered down upon them from the windows of the opposite houses. Several of the passers-by, on seeing the blood of the two mendicants thus flowing, quickly bestowed their alms, and thus the Burker's rage was somewhat appeased. The money thrown from the windows was speedily gathered up, and the gossoon, beckoning the Burker to follow, hurried away.

In a few minutes they stopped in a secluded place, and the gossoon, producing a small pot of ointment, applied some of it to his own arm and then to the Burker's. Having done this, he produced bandages likewise, and having made the Burker twist one around his arm, he proceeded to perform the same good office for that individual. The Burker

could not, however, help perceiving that whereas the gossoon had inflicted upon himself a comparatively trifling scratch, he had dealt far less considerately when plunging his knife into the arm of his comrade. But as the Burker now felt no pain since the application of the ointment, and as the bandage had stanched the blood, he suffered himself to be appeased by the prospect of a good meal, for he was ravenously hungry.

The gossoon led the way to that comestible shop which they had previously passed, and there he purchased an ample supply of provender. At another shop he procured a quantity of spirits, and thence he conducted the Burker to the khan, or accommodation-house, where they had passed the night. Here several other gossoons were already assembled, some devouring the food which they had procured with their morning's mendicity, others engaged in boiling their rice preparatory for their own meal. It did not however appear that any of them had achieved so much success as the squinting gossoon and the Burker, judging by the nature and quantity of the provisions that were displayed. While these two were eating and drinking, the other gossoons laughed and chatted amongst themselves, and the Burker's companion, presently joining in the discourse, soon made all the other gossoons burst into uproarious peals of laughter. At first the Burker was at a loss to comprehend the cause of this merriment, but when his companion pointed to the man's wounded arm, the latter became terribly irritated, and he bent a diabolically vindictive look on his comrade. The dervish thereupon jumped up from his seat, pointed to the doorway, and made signs to intimate that the Burker was quite at liberty to shift for himself if he thought fit. The Englishman gave a savage growl, and resigning himself to his destiny, went on eating and drinking without taking any further notice of his comrade or the other gossoons.

CHAPTER XXVI

TORTURES

Ten days elapsed, during which the Burker remained in the companionship of the squinting gossoon, and they wandered from one town to another. They were tolerably successful in their appeals to public charity, and during this interval it was not again found necessary to have recourse to the knives in order to awaken sympathy. The Burker ate and drank of the best; a couple of hours each day were generally sufficient to procure the requisite coin for the purchase of this food, and the houses of public accommodation afforded the wanderers a resting-place for the night. The Burker began to learn a few of the commonest words in the native language of his companion, and he thought that his present kind of life was not so very disagreeable, after all.

He soon perceived the motive by which the gossoon was influenced in making him his companion. It was tolerably evident that public sympathy was pretty well exhausted in respect to the tribe of mendicant dervishes, but the spectacle of a European in apparent distress gave an impulse to flagging charity. The Burker thus comprehended that it was more on his own account than for the gossoon's sake that alms poured in upon them, but the dervish himself endeavoured by all kinds of manœuvrings and stratagems to prevent this impression from taking a hold on the Englishman's mind. The Burker was, however, too shrewd not to fathom the truth, and he accordingly began to think that it would be better for his own interests if he were to dissolve the partnership of mendicity with the gossoon. His resolution to this effect was taken, and he now only awaited an opportunity to carry it out.

One morning, at the expiration of that interval we have noticed at the beginning of this chapter, the gossoon and the Burker reached a town of larger dimensions than any of those which they had as yet visited in company, and the dervish gave his comrade to understand that they would here reap a considerable harvest. Scarcely however had they entered the suburbs when they were seized upon by half a dozen peons, or native policemen, who seemed disposed to handle them roughly. The gossoon, setting up a hideous howling, drew forth his knife, and was preparing to attack his captors, when he was knocked down by a severe blow, and the weapon was wrested from him. The Burker was then searched, and his knife was likewise taken away, but he escaped any particular ill-treatment on account of offering no resistance. The two prisoners were then conducted hurriedly along the streets, and they were thus led to a large, gloomy-looking building, which the Burker fancied to be a prison. It however proved to be no house of permanent detention at all, for the building contained one large room, and though not a gaol, it was nevertheless a scene of terrific horrors.

There were about twenty persons seated upon a long bench against one of the walls of this room, the door of which was guarded by several peons. The Burker and the gossoon were conducted to the bench, and there they sat down amidst the other captives. With the exception of the Burker himself, all these prisoners were natives, belonging to different castes, and there were several females amongst them. These were weeping bitterly, while several of the men were howling, yelling, and wailing, all as if in anticipation of some terrible chastisement which they would shortly have to endure. There were, however, three or four men, evidently of a somewhat superior class, who maintained a dignified silence, and who had the air of innocent victims courageously resigning themselves to the pressure of some strong tyranny against which there was no appeal.

Upon a table in the middle of the room lay several articles of a miscellaneous character. There were whips and sticks, necklaces made of bones, hammers and nails, several brickbats, small iron rods with wooden handles, coils of rope, cocoanut shells, and little boxes the contents of which the Burker could not conjecture. As he glanced along the line

of captives upon the bench, he perceived that many of them kept flinging frighted and shuddering glances toward this table, so that at length the idea stole into the man's mind that the punishment to be expected was associated with the objects so ominously spread upon that board.

Presently a superior officer of the peons entered the room, and he made an imperious sign for the howlings, the lamentations, and the wailings to be hushed. To a certain extent he was obeyed, for the captives doubtless thought that their punishment would be meted, or rather mitigated, according to the degree of submissiveness they displayed. Some of the women however continued to weep with a bitterness which they were evidently unable to restrain.

The suspenseful curiosity of the Burker was at length about to be assuaged, but in a manner as horrible as if, when suffering from a burning thirst, the most noxious fluid was poured down his throat. A couple of the peons seized upon the Burker's comrade, and the wretched gossoon began to address them in a strain of the most piteous appeal. To these entreaties, however, they were not merely inaccessible, but with their clenched fists they dealt him some severe blows over the head in order to compel him to hold his peace. They then stretched him upon the floor, and one of the peons proceeded to administer a terrible fustigation with a large whip which he took from the table. The gossoon howled hideously, but the more he yelled, the heavier fell the blows, until at length the peon desisted from sheer exhaustion. The gossoon was then lifted up and forcibly expelled from the place.

One of the dignified-looking natives was now seized upon, and in silence did he submit to the torture he was about to undergo. In the first place, the peons twisted his ears with most merciless brutality, and though the victim writhed with the pain, yet did not a sound escape his lips. He was then made to kneel upon the floor, and a brick was placed in the bend of each leg, just within the knee-joint. A cord was then fastened around his waist; the extremities were fixed to his ankles, and his form was thus drawn down until the haunches rested upon the heels. When it is remembered that the bricks were inserted behind the knee-joints, the excruciating agony of this position can be fully comprehended. There the man was left in the middle of the room,

and another victim was now seized upon. This was also one of the dignified individuals who had maintained a profound silence, and the peons, taking a couple of the sticks from the table, tied them together at one end. The man's hands were now introduced between the two sticks, which were tightened over them and made to cross each other at the unfastened ends, so that the compression upon the hands was productive of a most hideous torture. The unfortunate victim bore it heroically, and in silence, for some minutes, until at length a low moan escaped his lips, and he sank down senseless. A couple of the females were now seized upon by the peons, and despite their piteous entreaties, the barbaric torture was applied. Their hands were likewise crushed between a couple of sticks; and this process, we may observe, is known in India by the name of the *kittee.* The piercing screams of the victims thrilled through the apartment, and when they seemed about to faint with excess of agony, the sticks were removed from their hands. But their punishment was not over, for the peons proceeded to tie the two females together by the long tresses of their back hair. With ruthless hands did the torturers fasten those knots so tightly as to cause the most terrible pain to the victims, and thus united, they were left, sitting back to back, on the floor.

There was an elderly female, well-dressed, and of most respectable appearance, who was seated in the midst of the captives on the bench. One of the peons now approached her, threw over her neck a chain made of bones, and spat in her face, while another peon took a stick and dealt her several severe blows over the shoulders. They then left her with the chain of bones around her neck, this punishment being one of the most degrading and derogatory that could be possibly inflicted on a native female of a respectable caste.

Another male victim was now seized upon, and to him was applied the torture known as the *anundal.* Being placed against the wall, he was compelled to stand upon one leg, and a cord being fastened around his neck, the extremity was tied by means of a thin string to the great toe of the upraised leg, and in this condition the wretched being was left. Another male victim was thrown upon the floor, a cord was likewise fastened around his neck, and the extremities

were tied to his feet, the head being drawn down till it rested on the knees. Then a large stone was placed upon his back, and in this position he also was left. A cord was now passed through a pulley attached to the ceiling; one extremity was fastened to the long, flowing hair of a female, and the other was tied to a ring in the wall, the cord being drawn just so tight as to compel the miserable victim to remain standing on the points of her toes. Next a brazier was brought in; some of the iron rods were placed in the burning charcoal, and when red-hot, these searing irons were applied to the bare arms or legs of other victims.

But now a still more exquisite process of torture was about to meet the horrified view of the Burker. A handsome young woman was to become its victim, and heartrending were her shrieks when by the preparations she comprehended what she had to endure. Being compelled to kneel upon the ground, she was stripped to the waist, and when her natural modesty prompted her to cross her arms over her bosom, the peons brutally drew those arms away, and fastened them by the wrists behind her back. A peon then took up the half of a cocoanut shell, and opening one of the little boxes upon the table, he dexterously shifted into that shell several insects which the box contained. These insects were of the species known as the carpenter-beetle, which are accustomed to bite with a stinging sensation infinitely more severe than the pain inflicted by an English wasp. Amidst the rending shrieks of the unfortunate young woman, the cocoanut shell was applied to one of her breasts, a peon holding it there, and two others of these miscreant torturers holding the victim herself so tightly and steadily as to prevent her from shaking off the shell by the convulsions of her excruciated form. Her screams were horrible to a degree, and it was not until she fainted that the torture was considered sufficient.

A beautiful young woman was the next victim. She was most respectably attired; her bearing in every sense indicated her to be a female of unimpeachable modesty, and in addition to a handsome countenance, she possessed a perfect symmetry of shape. When the executioners approached her, she threw herself upon her knees, stretching forth her clasped hands in agonizing appeal, but all in vain. She was stretched upon the bench, and a cloth was stuffed

into her mouth to drown her cries. The peons, ruthlessly tearing off her garments, stripped her to the waist, and a magnificent bust was thus revealed. It was no doubt on account of the superb contours of her bosom she was chosen for the particular torture which was now to be adopted. Firm, rounded, and admirably shaped, as if it were of statuary marble, was this young female's bust, and to each bosom was the *kittee* applied. The sticks, fastened two and two at each extremity, and formed of a wood just sufficiently supple to inflict the torture without breaking, were made to encircle and tighten around each breast as if securing those glowing orbs in a vice. The agony was terrific, and all the more so inasmuch as there was no vent for it through the portals of the lips, the suffocating cloth hushing the shrieks and screams that must have arisen as it were up into the very throat. The compressure of the bosom between the accursed sticks was continued with unrelenting ferocity until the torturers fancied that the victim had fainted, but life itself was extinct. She was a corpse! There, however, the wretches let her lie.

Several other species of torture were next administered to other victims. One was fastened to the wall, with a nail driven through his ear, in such a manner that he was compelled to keep standing upon the points of his toes. A donkey was led into the room, and the hair of another victim was tied to the animal's tail. The brute was then lashed with a whip, and it dragged the man rapidly through the open door into the streets, his cries and yells of agony reverberating through the place. At length every one of the captives had undergone some species of horrible chastisement, with the exception of the Burker. For nearly three hours had the proceedings now lasted, and the wretch had been compelled to sit gazing upon the sufferings of his fellow prisoners. Every instant he had shudderingly wondered when his turn would come, and which special torture would be allotted to himself. It seemed, however, as if there were an intention either to reserve him to the last, or to pass him over altogether, and the man earnestly hoped that this latter alternative would prove to be the case.

The officer of the peons now approached him, saying, in tolerably good English, " You are a European, perhaps an Englishman? "

The Burker replied in the affirmative, and besought mercy.

"Take yourself off, then," responded the officer, "and beware how you are again found in the company of any of those lazy vagabond impostors who prowl about the country and impose upon the charitable. Depart!"

The Burker did not require to be again bidden to quit that scene of horrors, and he hastened away.

We must here pause to assure the reader that we have dealt not in the slightest exaggeration while endeavouring to describe the process of diabolical tortures to which the natives of India are not merely liable, but to which they are often subjected. Perhaps it may be supposed that scenes of this description occur only in the domains of independent princes, but the very reverse is the fact, for they occur only in that part of India which groans beneath the tyranny of British rule. The object is to enforce the payment of the oppressive taxes which the Anglo-Indian government levies upon the native population, — chiefly upon the land-owners. India swarms with the collectors, and these harpies possess power to punish defaulters. The collectors themselves are for the most part of unprincipled character, and they conceal their own peculations, or administer to their extravagances, by compelling the natives to pay the same tax two or three times over. If a landowner should oppose their tyranny, he is seized upon and tortured; or if he hide himself, or undertake a journey in order to escape the importunity of the collector when visiting his district, his wife or his daughter may be rendered a victim in his place, — as was the case with those females whose sufferings we have just described. Moreover, in many towns of Anglo-India, mendicants and vagrants are subjected to the torture, and the license to use it being accorded to the local authorities, is frightfully abused. If a tax-collector or an officer of peons should chance to cast his eyes upon a handsome female, woe to her unless she surrender herself into the miscreant's arms! It is no vain threat which he holds forth to take her to the torture-chamber, and he will ruthlessly stand by to contemplate the maiming or mutilation, the crushing or the laceration of the charms which in the first instance fired his passion.

Yes, reader, torture exists in India under British rule; torture is inflicted by the officials of the Anglo-Indian government. Countless sums are subscribed annually at Exeter

Hall and elsewhere to furnish the means for missionaries to carry the gospel amongst the "benighted heathens and pagans" of that Oriental clime, but who of those missionaries has ever returned to England to raise an indignant voice against the infliction of the torture upon the poor Hindus? A pretty opinion must those unfortunates have of the nation to which belong the missionaries who would convert them, and a fine notion must they entertain of that religion which seeks to proselytize them. Of the full amount of horrors committed by British rule in Hindustan, the masses of our people have but a faint idea, but we solemnly assure them that no single detail of the above given description of the torture-chamber in India is in any way exaggerated.

We now resume the thread of our narrative. The Burker, on emerging from the midst of that scene of horrors, sped through the streets, anxious to escape as soon as possible from a town where vagrancy was so frightfully punished. He beheld not the gossoon, nor did he indeed take any trouble to look for him; he was glad to have got rid of such a dangerous companionship. Issuing from the town in the contrary direction from that by which he had entered it, the Burker proceeded at random across the open country, until the sultriness of the sun at length compelled him to seek the refreshing shade of some trees; for since quitting the jungle he experienced no apprehension on reposing himself beneath such umbrageous canopies. He soon fell fast asleep; his slumber lasted for several hours, and when he awoke, it was with a gnawing sensation of hunger in his stomach.

But, ah, who was this that was seated on the grass near him? It was his late companion, the squint-eyed gossoon, who appeared to have been patiently waiting until the Burker should arouse himself. For a moment an expression of annoyance passed over the Englishman's features, but his looks as well as his mood speedily changed when the gossoon emptied upon the grass the contents of his wallet. The fare thus furnished was good, and the gossoon grinned with a malicious triumph as he perceived the aspect of vexation flit away from the Burker's countenance. They both commenced an attack upon the provender, which they washed down with a quantity of spirits from the flask that the wallet likewise contained.

When the meal was over, the gossoon made dolorous signs

to indicate the sufferings he had endured in the torture-chamber, and he seemed anxious to know with what nature and degree of punishment the Burker himself had got off. The Englishman quickly gave him to understand that he had escaped scot free, whereat the gossoon regarded him with the most unfeigned astonishment. Recourse being had once more to the contents of the flask, the gossoon made a sign that they should continue their way. The Burker could not help keeping in the man's company again, at least for the present, but he nevertheless resolved to separate from him as soon as possible, for the warning of the officer of the peons rang in his ears, and the spectacle of the torture-chamber was vividly present to his memory. He had ascertained beyond the possibility of doubt, from the presence of those peons at the town he had so recently left, that he was now upon the soil of the British possessions, and he was therefore relieved from the dread of being apprehended by any of Queen Indora's emissaries.

The gossoon and the Burker continued their way until the sun was low in the western horizon, and the Englishman, being well wearied, made a sign to his companion that they must soon think of finding a place for repose. The gossoon himself was much fatigued, and he seemed uncertain which direction to take. He stopped and looked about him, until at length descrying a house at a distance, he pointed thither. Toward that house the two men accordingly proceeded, and as they drew near the dwelling, the Burker saw that it was a farmhouse. On reaching it, the gossoon did not immediately proceed to the front door, but a side window being open, he peeped in. The Burker looked over his shoulder, and they both beheld an elderly man, a Hindu native of the ryot or landholding class, counting his money at a table. He was alone in that room, and so intent was he in the counting of his rupees, that he evidently suspected not the presence of the witnesses at the window. The gossoon flung upon the Burker a look of mysterious significancy, which the latter could not rightly comprehend, and then the dervish hastily led his English companion toward the front door.

There the gossoon commenced the usual whine with which persons of his profession solicit charity in India, and in a few moments the elderly ryot made his appearance. Nothing could exceed the fawning humility of the gossoon's demean-

our, which the Burker imitated as well as he could. The ryot was astonished to see a European in the vagrant companionship of a dervish, and the gossoon immediately proceeded to give voluble utterance to some tale, of which the Burker was evidently the hero. That this tale was replete with woes and sufferings, as well as injuries and wrongs sustained, was likewise evident, for the elderly ryot contemplated the Burker with an increasing degree of interest, and when the gossoon had ceased speaking, the hospitable master of the homestead invited them both to enter. He set food before them; they ate and drank, and when they had finished their meal, the ryot conducted them to a little back room where he meant them to repose for the night.

The sun had by this time set, and the room was involved in almost complete darkness, but scarcely had the hospitable ryot retired, when the gossoon nudged the Burker and gave him to understand that he was not to go to sleep. It now occurred to the Englishman that the gossoon was contemplating some bold or stealthy step in respect to the ryot's money, for he remembered the significant look which the dervish had bent upon him ere they had retired from the window of the landowner's private room. In a few minutes they heard the front door of the house open, and then there were the sounds of three or four voices in conversation together in a neighbouring apartment. It was evident that some of the ryot's family, or else his domestics, had returned from their occupations on the farm. The Burker was wondering whether this circumstance would alter the gossoon's plan, whatever it were, when that individual gave him another significant nudge, so that the Englishman felt convinced his comrade entertained his original intention.

They sat in silence in their little room for about an hour and a half, when they heard footsteps moving about the house, followed by the closing of different doors, so that they knew the family was retiring to rest. Another hour passed in total silence, the gossoon, however, occasionally nudging his companion, as if to bid him keep awake. At length the dervish seemed to think the moment was come for the execution of his project, and he slowly opened the door. There was a passage with which other rooms communicated, and sufficient light streamed through a small window to show the two men where the doors of those apartments were

situated. The gossoon comprehended the geography of the place better than the Burker, and he proceeded slowly and cautiously to open a door on the left hand side of the passage. There also the light streamed in from the starlit heavens, and the gossoon, having first looked carefully into the chamber, beckoned the Burker to follow him. The hospitable ryot was sleeping there. The gossoon crept toward the couch, and just as he reached it, the ryot started up. But the gossoon flew at him as if he had for the nonce borrowed a tiger's power and agility, and his hands clutched the unfortunate man's throat. No cry escaped the ryot's lips, no sound but a suffocating, gasping gurgle, but for an instant there was a violent struggle between the two, until the Burker threw himself upon the ryot's form and held him down. The horrible process of murder lasted not then many minutes. The deed was accomplished; the individual who had afforded such generous hospitality to the two miscreants lay a corpse in his bed. The gossoon had proved himself as ruthless and merciless an assassin as even the Burker was in his own native clime.

When the tragedy was accomplished, the two men listened for a few moments, but all was silent. They then began ransacking the furniture and boxes in the room, and after some little difficulty they discovered the place where their victim had concealed his hoarded rupees. These were contained in two bags, which seemed to be of tolerably equal weight and dimensions; the gossoon accordingly took one, the Burker the other. They then issued from the chamber of death by means of that window through which they had first become acquainted with the fact that the ryot possessed the coin that proved the temptation to commit this heinous crime.

But it seemed as if the gossoon were not contented with what he had done, or, at all events, he thought that another crime must be perpetrated to conceal the first one. There was an immense quantity of rice-straw in the immediate vicinity of the dwelling, and by the means of ignition which the gossoon always carried about with him, he set fire to the stack. The flame blazed up, almost immediately seizing upon the house itself, which was built of combustible materials, and away sped the incendiary, closely followed by the Burker. The latter could not help thinking that the crime

was a bold one altogether, though he had no remorse on its account; but he fancied that if the other inmates of the house should escape from the conflagration, the murder and the robbery might possibly be discovered, and they could scarcely fail to know that the ryot had awarded his hospitality to two men who would be missing. However, the triple turpitude of murder, robbery, and arson was consummated; it was too late to recall either of the foul deeds, and the Burker thought within himself that the gossoon must have had excellent reasons for superadding the last crime to the two former.

On they went together, and every now and then, as they looked back, they beheld the tremendous conflagration, but the Burker could distinguish no persons moving about in the vicinage of the flames. At length a grove hid the burning scene from the view of the criminals, and they reached a cave, where they passed the remainder of the night. At dawn they resumed their journey, and the gossoon was now careful to avoid towns or large villages. They procured refreshments at isolated cottages, either through charity or by paying for their food, but they were equally careful not to display the large sums of money which they possessed.

Ten days passed after the terrible crimes which we have just recorded, and many a long mile had the criminals journeyed together, thus continuously increasing the interval between themselves and the scene of their turpitude. At length the gossoon evidently thought that they were completely safe, and they entered a small town which they now reached. Here they purchased a quantity of excellent provisions, and some article which they thus bought was wrapped up by the shopkeeper in a piece of a newspaper. On reaching the khan, where they purposed to pass the night, the Burker happening to look at the fragment of newspaper, discovered that it was printed in the English language. It was one of the small local journals which are issued in that tongue in India. While eating his supper, the Burker looked over its contents, until his attention was riveted to a paragraph headed "Terrible Fire and Loss of Life."

He read the paragraph, and he found that it related to the very deed of blackest turpitude which himself and the

gossoon had perpetrated. It appeared (according to the journal) that every soul in the house had perished in the flames, which had spread with such rapidity that there was no possibility of escape. A wandering gossoon and some European of a very low description were reported to have perished at the same time, the particulars of the conflagration having been furnished by two labouring men who had partaken of supper at the house, but had afterward quitted it to retire to the cottage which they inhabited at a little distance. The Burker now comprehended why the gossoon had set fire to the premises. With a devilish shrewdness he had foreseen this catastrophe, or, at all events, he had thought it was worth while to perpetrate this last crime with the chance that it would conceal the previous ones.

The Englishman pointed to the newspaper, and partly by signs, partly by aid of the few words of Hindustani he had picked up, he made the dervish comprehend the nature of its contents. A diabolical satisfaction was expressed on the Hindu's countenance, and the Burker could not help regarding the gossoon as a villain endowed with a boldness and a shrewdness well calculated to win any other villain's admiration.

The meal of which they partook was a copious one, and they washed it down with proportionate quantities of alcoholc fluid. It happened that they were alone together in the khan, and they were likewise alone when they lay down to rest. The Burker was more than half-intoxicated with the liquor he had imbibed, and he slept most soundly. The sun had risen some time when he awoke, and he immediately missed the gossoon. An idea of treachery flashed through his brain; he thrust his hands beneath his garments, and a terrible imprecation burst from his lips as he discovered that his bag of money was gone. He looked about him in the last wild, faint hope that it might have slipped out from his buttoned up coat while he was slumbering, but no, it had vanished! Nothing could exceed the rage of the Burker. It was only the night before that he had resolved upon playing the gossoon precisely the same trick, but he was foiled, he was baffled, he was forestalled. Oh, if he could only fall in with the squinting villain, what a terrible vengeance would he wreak upon him! From the very first moment he met that

gossoon at the cave in the jungle, he had hated him; he had continued to hate him throughout the three weeks of their wandering companionship, and now this hatred expanded into a craving for the direst vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RUINED TEMPLE

Once more did the Burker find himself a moneyless outcast in a strange land. He had not even a morsel of food to put between his lips, for the gossoon had carried off the wallet which contained the remnant of the provender purchased on the preceding evening. Hungry and miserable, almost as desponding and as despairing as he had ever been even when in the depths of the hideous jungle, the Englishman went forth from the khan. He had some idea of playing the part of howling mendicant by himself, but beholding a couple of peons proceeding through the street, he thought of the tortures, and he quitted the town.

For several hours he wandered through the country, reckless in which direction he proceeded, having no fixed aim, but wondering what would become of himself. At length he reached a pile of ruins, which seemed to be the remains of some ancient temple. He remembered the ruined temple he had seen in the jungle, and his blood ran cold at the recollection of how he had there beheld snakes coiling all over the black marble image. He therefore hesitated to enter amidst these ruins, although the beams of the meridian sun were pouring down with all their burning heat upon him. He was faint and exhausted with hunger, with weariness, and with the intolerable sultriness of the day; he therefore at last mustered up courage sufficient to penetrate into the ruins.

Amidst huge blocks of granite did the Englishman work his way, over prostrate pillars and crumbling columns did he step, until he at length found himself inside as much as remained of the edifice itself. He perceived one large image upon a pedestal, and another lying amidst the rank grass which grew where a pavement of stone or marble once had been.

As he was proceeding cautiously, the Burker's foot kicked against something amidst the grass, and it being of a very hard substance, he had no fear that it was any coiled up reptile. He stooped down, and felt about upon the spot; his hand encountered an iron ring fastened to the middle of a stone about two feet square. Thinking that the circumstance was worth while to be further investigated, and having ideas of buried treasures floating through his mind, the Englishman began to remove the long grass which grew all about the stone, and when he had torn up the rank herbage by the roots, he found that the stone was set in the midst of surrounding pavement, upon which a surface of earth had accumulated sufficient to produce and nourish the grass which he had thus cleared. He now endeavoured to raise the stone, but vain were his attempts. Exhausted thereby, he desisted, and began to console himself for his failure in a fashion somewhat similar to that of the fox with respect to the grapes in the fable. He muttered between his lips that the stone with the ring doubtless covered the mouth of a well, and that any idea of a buried treasure was idle and ridiculous.

The exceeding sultriness of the sun compelled the Burker to remain within the shade afforded by the ruined temple. He was faint with hunger and parched with thirst; he resolved at the approach of evening to quit his present quarters, and appeal to the charity of some dweller at any neighbouring cottage for food and a night's rest. Perhaps through the man's mind floated the idea of enriching himself once more by means similar to those which had temporarily put him in possession of a bag of rupees, for crime is horribly suggestive, even on the part of those who by their own misdeeds would appear to stand in need of no such hints at all.

In a short time the thirst of the Burker grew so intolerable that he was compelled to issue forth from the ruined temple in the hope of finding some neighbouring spring. But scarcely had he advanced a dozen yards from the dilapidated edifice when he beheld the unmistakable form of the squint-eyed gossoon approaching. It was with a sudden yell of rage that the Burker bounded toward his late companion, but the latter, with a malignant grin, drew forth a sharp poniard from beneath his garments, and holding its point toward the Burker, seemed to say, " Come on if you dare! "

The Englishman stopped short, scowling horribly; the gossoon burst out into a laugh, which only irritated the Englishman more than ever, if possible, against him, so that at all risks he was on the very point of springing at the treacherous dervish, when this individual suddenly tossed his wallet toward him. The Burker picked it up, and as he opened it, his hand first of all encountered a flask. This he at once applied to his lips, and the potent alcohol he imbibed tended to appease his rage somewhat and improve his humour. He glanced at the gossoon, who was now grinning, nodding, and wagging his head, and squinting more horribly than ever with his right eye.

The wallet contained some tempting provisions, and the Burker was already commencing a ravenous attack upon them when the gossoon spoke something and made him a sign to repair to the ruins of the temple. The Burker hesitated and looked suspicious, but the Hindu replaced his dagger beneath his garments, and made signs of amity and peace. The Burker thought that, after all, the gossoon could entertain no murderous intention toward him, for if so, he might have already carried it into effect while he was inspecting the wallet, and therefore he no longer hesitated to return into the temple. There they sat down together, eating and drinking just as if their companionship had never once been interrupted by the perfidy of the Hindu; and when the meal was concluded, the gossoon rose and began to examine the interior of the ruins, evidently with the air of a man who beheld them for the first time. The Burker meanwhile was wondering whether his companion still had the bags of rupees about him, and if so, how he could turn the tables and become the despoiler. All of a sudden an ejaculation escaped the lips of the dervish, — he had discovered the stone with the iron ring.

The Burker now approached the spot, and partly by signs, partly by means of the few words of Hindustani with which he was acquainted, he gave the gossoon to understand that it was he himself who had torn up the grass, but that he had vainly endeavoured to lift the stone. The gossoon attempted the task, but appeared equally unable to perform it. He then took his dagger, and with the point endeavoured to work away the cement which united the stone to the surrounding ones. While he was thus occupied, an idea entered

into the Burker's head. He thought that he might seize the opportunity of gratifying his vengeance and recovering possession of his bag of rupees, with the gossoon's treasure likewise, all at the same time. His eye settled upon a fragment of masonry which lay conveniently near, and which was of dimensions suitable to be wielded for his murderous purpose, when the gossoon, suddenly starting up from the work in which he had been engaged, bent upon the Englishman a ferocious look, as if by some extraordinary intuition he had read what was passing in his mind. The Burker scowled, in order to veil his confusion, for he recollected that the gossoon had in every sense the advantage of him, being armed with a weapon, and being physically stronger, as he had proven at the cave in the jungle.

All in a moment the Hindu's appearance changed; he smiled and nodded in the most amicable manner, giving utterance to words which the Burker comprehended were to the effect that they should thenceforth be friends again. He drew forth the stolen bag of rupees from amidst his garments, and tossed the treasure to the Burker. This was a proof of amicable intentions, and the Englishman was rejoiced to regain possession of his portion of the wealth that had been procured by a share in the crime. It struck him that the gossoon entertained the hope that he stood upon the threshold of some important discovery in respect to the stone with the ring, and that he felt he could not well act without the assistance or the services of the Burker, and hence his change of demeanour toward him. Again did ideas of a buried treasure troop through the Englishman's mind, and, willing to enter into a renewed partnership with the gossoon, he proffered his hand. The Hindu took it; the flask was produced from the wallet, and they appeared to vow mutual friendship, each in a dram of the potent spirits.

The gossoon, now abandoning the process of picking away the mortar, which seemed an interminable one, for it was nearly as hard as the stones which it cemented together, examined the ring with a scrutinizing attention. Presently he began to work the ring about in different ways, and to endeavour to turn it around. In this he at length succeeded, and with but little difficulty he moved the stone, or rather, we should say, not merely the one which contained the ring, but the surrounding smaller ones to which it was joined.

Instead of opening like a trap-door, the mass of masonry rolled aside, disclosing an aperture large enough for a stout person to pass through. An ejaculation of joy burst from the gossoon's lips, and the Burker was now full of excited curiosity and suspense.

The stone covering of the aperture was fixed by rings, on its underneath part, to two iron bars running horizontal and parallel three or four inches below the aperture, so that the masonry could not be raised, but it slid with comparative ease sideways when the spring which retained it fast was acted upon by the turning of the iron ring. There was a flight of stone steps leading down into utter darkness, nor was it possible to conjecture to what depth the abyss descended. The gossoon collected together a quantity of dry branches and leaves from some trees in the immediate vicinage of the temple, and making a loose fagot, he set fire to these combustible materials. He threw the blazing torch into the subterranean, and the glare was sufficient to show that it was a room, or cavern, of about ten feet in depth, to which the steps led down.

The gossoon rubbed his hands, laughed gleefully, and gave every evidence of his conviction that some discovery most important to himself and his companion was about to be made. He then proceeded to manufacture three or four torches, and when this task was accomplished, he signalled the Burker to descend into the cavern for the purposes of research. But the Englishman, terribly suspicious of perfidy, shook his head, and intimated that it was the gossoon who ought to be the first to descend. The Hindu, thinking that his companion required some fresh proof of his sincerity toward him, drew forth his poignard, snapped the blade in halves, and tossed the fragments amidst the ruins. The Burker now thought that he need no longer hesitate, but still he made a sign for the gossoon to follow him. The Hindu assented; two torches were lighted, and the Burker, carrying one, began the descent of the stone steps. The Hindu, carrying the other, was close behind him.

They found themselves, as they expected, in a small room of about the depth which we have already specified, and it was probably eight feet square by six in width. Along one of the walls several small vases were ranged, and on the lids of these being lifted off, they were found to be filled

with coins, but so discoloured as to afford the idea at first that they were all of copper or even of a baser metal. But the dervish, with another ejaculation of joy, rang a few of them on the paved floor, bit them with his teeth, and proved them to be silver. He then danced in the gleefulness of his mood, and the Burker was likewise so overjoyed that he forgot all his past enmity and hatred toward the man through whose instrumentality this colossal treasure was discovered.

Some minutes elapsed before the gossoon could so far regain his composure as to reflect upon the course which was next to be adopted. Nor did it appear as if he were very well able to make up his mind in a hurry, for he signalled to the Burker that they should quit the cavern for the present. The Englishman now once again abandoned himself to the guidance of the gossoon, and he offered no objection when that individual began to lead the way up the stone steps. They had each lighted a second torch, but these were already burned so low as to last but for a minute or two longer.

The gossoon, as we have said, began to lead the way up the steps, the Burker following. But all in a moment it struck the latter that the Hindu was hastening up with a suspicious quickness, and an idea of treachery flashed through the Englishman's mind. The gossoon sprang out of the aperture, and the next instant the Burker, to his horror, beheld the masonry gliding over him. With a cry, or, rather, yell, at the hideous thought of being buried alive in that tomb, he thrust up his right hand, which held the fragment of the blazing torch, and it came in contact with the gossoon's hand, which was upon the ring of the central stone. A howl of agony burst from the Hindu as the blazing fagot broke all over his flesh; his hand quitted its hold on the ring. The Burker rolled back the masonry, and leaped forth from the subterranean.

Now these two men stood facing each other with aspects of fierce and malignant defiance. The gossoon's treachery was but too well understood by the Burker, for the perfidious Hindu had intended to accomplish his death by starvation or suffocation in the subterranean, so that he might possess himself of the whole of the treasure. The Burker could no more repose the slightest confidence in

him; the gossoon evidently felt this, and thus the two men stood confronting each other, as if with the mutual conviction that one must now die in order for the survivor to be safe. Both were unarmed, and each seemed fearful of commencing the attack. The gossoon had not the same confidence in himself as when he suddenly pounced upon the Burker and hurled him down at the cave in the jungle. Perhaps he knew that he had then merely taken him by surprise, and that by sheer agility he had performed a feat for a repetition of which he could not hope, now that his opponent stood entirely upon his guard. On the other hand, the Englishman was equally reluctant to be the first to close in the death-struggle, for fear lest the gossoon should have some fresh manœuvre or practise some artifice for which he was unprepared. They were like two wild beasts, determined upon an encounter, whose ferocious instincts could not be otherwise appeased, yet neither daring to commence the attack, each waiting to take the other at disadvantage, their eyes glaring, their forms quivering, with every muscle and tendon vibrating under the influence of terrific excitement and suspense.

At length, with characteristic desperation, the Burker sprang at his foe, whom he endeavoured to clutch by the throat, but the gossoon, to a certain extent avoiding the attack, seized the Burker around the waist and hurled him to the ground, thus repeating the feat which he had performed at the cave in the jungle. The Englishman, however, held fast to his opponent, and amidst the grass did they struggle in the immediate vicinage of the mouth of the subterranean. All in a moment there was the sharp, quick, ominous hiss of a deadly reptile, and a cobra, uprearing its hooded head, darted at the face of the gossoon, who was uppermost at the instant, his hands clutching the Burker's clothes, and the Burker retaining him likewise in his powerful grasp. The Burker instantaneously sprang up to his feet, horrified and dismayed, a cold perspiration breaking out all over him, while the gossoon, with an anguished yell, likewise started up, the cobra having bitten him on the cheek. Quick as lightning the half-maddened dervish snatched up a stone and hurled it at the serpent as it was gliding again amidst the grass. The reptile was stricken just behind its hooded head, and it continued to writhe beneath the stone which held it firmly down to the earth. Making a piteous sign to

the Burker to leave him unmolested, the gossoon hastily gathered some herbs, which he selected from amongst the grass, and putting them into his mouth, he began to chew them, his whole frame quivering with the nervous excitement and suspense of his feelings. For a few minutes the Burker looked on, he himself being scarcely able to shake off the horrifying sensation which had seized upon him at this terrific interruption of the struggle with the gossoon, but as he gradually collected his ideas, he began to deliberate on the course which he should pursue. The gossoon, having chewed the herbs into a poultice, applied it to his cheek with one hand, while with the other he made deprecating signs to the Burker, evidently entreating him to let him have this one last chance of life, and that under existing circumstances all personal hostility should be suspended. But the Englishman was already reflecting that if the medicinal properties of the herbs should neutralize the venom of the snake-bite, — in short, if the gossoon should continue to enjoy a hale and vigorous life, — they would stand toward each other in precisely the same position as before. They would have the same feeling that the security of the one could only be guaranteed by the death of the other, for they were mutually suspicious. The Burker especially could no longer trust the gossoon, and the latter had moreover given him a suggestion to the effect that the treasure might as well be possessed by one as by both.

Thus was it that the Burker came to the conclusion that it were ridiculous to lose the present opportunity, and to suffer the gossoon to obtain an advantage over him. He therefore all in a moment darted back a few yards, caught up a huge stone in both his hands, and hurled it at the Hindu. The latter beheld the movement and started aside, but that movement was too rapid to fail altogether in its effect, and the stone, instead of striking the head of the dervish, smote him on the shoulder. Down he fell, sending forth a howl that reverberated through the ruins, but the Burker suffered not an instant to elapse ere he repeated the assault. Another stone was flung, this time with better effect; it struck the gossoon upon the head. The crashing of his skull would have sounded horrible upon the ears of any other person but the Burker, who remorselessly hastened to despatch his victim.

Thus was the Burker rid of the gossoon, the man who had been his companion, in some sense his friend, but chiefly an enemy. Sole master of the treasure was the Burker now, but how could he render it available? He had no means of conveyance for such a quantity of jars, and if he were to load himself with the coin, he could bear but comparatively a small portion of it away with him. He must have time to reflect. But he remembered that if any of the inhabitants or authorities of the district, or any wayfarers, should happen to find him amongst those ruins with a corpse, it would be instantaneously supposed that he had committed a foul murder, without provocation, and without the faintest shadow of excuse for the crime. He therefore resolved to conceal the dead body; and having rifled it, he dragged it to the extremity of the ruins, where he covered it with fragments of the dilapidated masonry. When this was done, the Burker sat down upon a mass of granite to think of the course which he should now pursue. To remove the treasure without a vehicle was impossible; to obtain one, without exciting suspicion of some sort or another, seemed equally impracticable for a person situated as he was. True, he had a quantity of money about him, his own bag of rupees, and the gossoon's likewise, for he had taken this from about the person of the corpse, but his wretched apparel, his ill looks, and his suspicious appearance would inevitably bring him into trouble if he were to proceed to any house and exhibit sufficient coin for the hire or purchase of a cart. Then, what was he to do? The only plan appeared to be the first which he had thought of, namely, that of securing about his person as much of the treasure as possible, and taking his departure from that spot.

Having made up his mind to the pursuance of this course, the Burker proceeded to manufacture a couple of torches similar to those which he had just now seen the gossoon make; and inasmuch as from the rifled garments of the corpse he had procured the materials for striking a light, he prepared for another descent into the subterranean. The sliding trap-door of masonry was opened, and, having lighted one of his torches, the Burker descended the steps. But not many moments had he been in the cavern when he was startled by hearing a sort of subdued growl somewhere within the ruins. He thought that it must be fancy, or at

least endeavoured to persuade himself that it was, but the sound was repeated, and it was accompanied by a slight rustling of the long grass where it was not cleared away. For a few instants the Englishman was so paralyzed by mortal terror as to be unable to take any decisive step, until suspense grew horrible beyond all endurance, and then, with a torch still burning in his hand, he began to ascend the steps. With exceeding caution, shuddering from head to foot, and horribly alarmed lest some wild animal should spring at him, the Burker thus raised himself up until his eyes could just look over the level of the aperture. Then a fierce growl saluted his ears, instantaneously followed by a second sound which may be described as a savage howl of affright, and he beheld a huge tiger retreating slowly, evidently in alarm at the light of the torch. The Burker was so smitten with consternation that he nearly fell down the steps; but, suddenly recovering his presence of mind, he closed the trap-door, all except about an inch, and he left it thus far open for two reasons. The first was that the spring might not be so acted upon as to prevent him from opening the trap-door again from within the cavern, and the other was that he might not altogether shut out the air necessary for life. So horribly bewildered, however, were the wretched man's thoughts, that it struck him not at the instant that the first reason was alone sufficient as a motive for leaving the trap-door partially unclosed without the adjunctive of the second. Yet both ideas had flashed to his mind at the same instant, and even in the hideous turmoil of his thoughts they had suggested that precautionary measure.

He now lost no time in lighting the second torch, for the first was nearly extinct, and he shrank from the idea of being left in the dark in that subterranean. He heard the stealthy catlike paces of the tiger returning to the trap-door which covered the aperture of the cavern, and his blood congealed with horror lest the monster should be by any means enabled to get at him. Next he heard the tiger sniffing about above the trap-door, and then, through the slight opening which he had left, he could perceive a dark substance intercepting the light. A low, savage growl made him aware that the tiger had scented his presence in the cavern, and returning up the steps, he suddenly thrust the torch upward in such

a way that the flame ascended through the crevice. So furious a roar burst from the throat of the tiger that the ruins appeared to be all alive with horrible sounds, and the Burker was terrified at the result of his proceeding. He listened with suspended breath; he could hear nothing, he hoped that the wild beast was gone. The torch was burning out; in a few more minutes he would be in darkness. All continued silent; he began to breathe more freely, but now the torch was extinct. Should he ascend from the cavern? Dared he leave his hiding-place? At all events, should he not first carry out his design of securing as much coin as possible about his person?

Scarcely had he mentally asked himself these questions, or rather, we should say, scarcely were they shaped by the current of his thoughts, when another subdued growl reached his ears, and this was speedily followed by different sounds. There was the tearing down of masonry, the hurling about of stones, the rushing movements of the wild beast, all mingled with fierce and savage, but still subdued growlings. The Burker speedily comprehended what the monster was about. The tiger had discovered the corpse of the gossoon in its rude, uncouth sepulchre, and the beast was clearing all obstacles away previous to dragging it forth. Now the Burker could at length tell that this was achieved, for the noise of the tiger's savage gambolings reached the ears of the horrified wretch who was pent up in the cavern. As a cat plays with a mouse, so was the wild beast disporting with the dead body.

The Burker was in utter darkness, save and except where a feeble glimmering penetrated through the chink caused by the slightly opened trap-door, but this gleaming was gradually growing fainter and fainter as the shades of evening were closing in upon the earth. Good heavens! was the Englishman to remain all night in that cavern, with the horrible tiger watching an opportunity to make him its prey? The thought was enough to turn his brain. There he was, surrounded by riches sufficient to enable him to revel in all luxuries for the remainder of his life, however extended that life might be, but he would gladly give all the contents of those jars for the privilege of being seated in some wretched khan, over a sorry mess of rice, so long as it was in the midst of a town within the limits of which the tiger would not be likely to come.

It did not appear that the wild beast chose to banquet upon the dead man; the tiger was doubtless waiting for the living one. Its maw required to be refreshed with the warm blood gushing from veins just torn open, and it could not be appeased by the blood that had stagnated in the veins of the dead. But ever and anon the tiger came to the trap-door at the mouth of the cavern, scraping, scratching, and tearing with its paws, as if by some means to widen the chink left by the partially opened masonry. Then, at those times, the Burker's blood would curdle almost as completely as that of the dead gossoon, for he was tortured with the horrible apprehension that the tiger might manage to tear open the trap-door, or, rather, make it slide completely back. And during the intervals between the wild beast's visits to the trap-door other frightful ideas crept into the Burker's mind. Perhaps there might be reptiles in that cavern? Perhaps some deadly snake was gliding toward him, stealthy, insidious, and noiseless, to dart at his leg or twine up it? Oh, what maledictions did the Burker invoke upon the jars of treasure which he had discovered! How heartily did he wish that the instant the gossoon was dead he had rushed away from the spot!

An hour passed in the frightful manner which we have been describing, until at length the tiger stretched itself down upon the trap-door, as if resolved to wait until its intended victim should be by some means or another compelled to come forth. At first the wild beast was restless and uneasy, continuing to claw at that trap-door, and growling, sometimes loudly, sometimes in a subdued manner, until at length it appeared to fall asleep, or at all events it remained perfectly still. The Burker was fearful lest the monstrous beast should lie so completely over the chink as to shut out all the fresh air, for he had already become sensible of the close and stagnating nature of the atmosphere in that subterranean. But it happened that the tiger did not thus cover up that opening with its furred form; no doubt it was lying there with its muzzle close to the very opening itself, so as to be in readiness to seize upon its victim at his first endeavour to issue from the subterranean trap in which, mouselike, he was caught.

Thus passed the night. We might fill whole pages by depicting the horrible thoughts which raged and agitated

in the mind of the Burker, — thoughts which fastened like vulture talons on his brain, thoughts which at one time goaded him almost to madness, and which at another froze all the blood in his veins and produced a sensation which struck like an ice-chill to his heart. But all these details we must leave to be elaborated by the conception of our readers. Suffice it to say that the Burker passed such a night as must have atoned — if earthly penalties ever can atone — for no small portion of the misdeeds that had branded his life.

As the morning began to dawn, the tiger rose from off the trap-door, and walked around and around it for upwards of an hour, giving vent to subdued growls the whole time. Then, suddenly, with one tremendous roar, it appeared to fling itself with a kind of desperation upon the partial opening of the trap-door, tearing at it with its claws, lashing its own sides and the ground with its tail, evidently furious and frantic at being thus kept away from the victim it sought to clutch; but at last finding its efforts were all of no avail, the animal desisted, and the Burker could hear its catlike paces retreating from the vicinage of the trap-door. Nearly an hour passed, and there were no evidences of the return of the tiger nor of its presence anywhere within the precincts of the ruins. The Burker began to take courage; he knew that wild beasts seldom prowl about in the open country during the broad daylight, and he was resolved that the monster should not catch him there again in the evening. Cautiously sliding back the trap-door, he looked out, and the coast seemed clear, at least within the range of his vision. He felt cheered and invigorated by breathing the fresh air, and emerging completely from the cavern, he looked in the direction of the spot where he had concealed the gossoon. A hideous spectacle met his eyes. All the clothing was stripped off the corpse, and lay scattered about in rags and tatters. The stones with which the dead body were covered had been cast or rolled to a considerable distance, thereby proving the strength of the wild beast. As for the corpse itself, it was frightfully lacerated, mangled, and mutilated; in many places the flesh was completely torn off the bones by the claws of the tiger, but it did not appear as if the animal had banqueted upon any of the flesh.

The Burker had possessed himself of the dead gossoon's

wallet, containing the remnant of that individual's provisions, and he now made a copious meal, washing it down with a good draught of the potent alcohol. He then resolved to carry into execution his plan of quitting the ruins, but first he peeped cautiously forth to assure himself that the tiger was not still loitering about in the neighbourhood. On this point he was satisfied, and descending again into the cavern, he was about to secure a quantity of the treasure, as much, indeed, as he could carry off, when he heard a singular sound, like the lowing of a trumpet. Rushing up the steps, he looked forth from the ruins, and he beheld a colossal elephant approaching, with a mahout, or driver, seated upon his back. This individual was a Hindu, not above thirty years of age, with rather a handsome countenance, and an expression of benevolence as well as of good-humour. He did not exhibit much surprise on beholding the Burker, doubtless for the reason that he was accustomed to frequent those cities and towns where Europeans swarmed, and he addressed the Englishman in the customary terms of morning salutation. These the Burker understood, and he replied to the best of his ability. Pleased with the aspect of the man, taking his demeanour to be friendly, and gazing upon the colossal proportions of the elephant, which had sent forth that trumpet-sound from its trunk, the Burker was smitten with an idea. He would make a confidant of the mahout in respect to the treasure; the whole or at least the greater portion might be conveyed away by the elephant, and when some distant place of safety was reached, it might be fairly divided.

The Burker accordingly made rapid signs for the mahout to enter the ruins with him, and he likewise spoke as many words of Hindustani as he could command to make his new acquaintance aware that a tiger had visited the scene, so that the mahout should be prepared for beholding the mangled corpse of the gossoon. On the terrible word " tiger " being mentioned, the Hindu armed himself with a brace of pistols, which were in the holsters attached to the girth of the little seat upon the elephant's back, and quitting the docile animal, he followed the Burker into the ruins. The Hindu was horrified on beholding the corpse of the gossoon, but by his looks he evidently comprehended that the Burker had told him the truth in respect to the mutilations having been ef-

fected by a wild beast. The Englishman now directed the mahout's attention to the sliding trap-door, and lighting a torch, he led the way down into the cavern. The Hindu followed him in fullest confidence, — as indeed he well might, for he was armed with pistols and other weapons, whereas the Burker was defenceless. On beholding the vases filled with coins, the native's countenance expressed admiration, wonder, and joy, and the Englishman, by means of signs and the few words which he could command, gave him to understand that they would remove and share this hoard of wealth. The mahout grasped the Burker's hand in ratification of the bargain, as well as in token of friendship, and they went to work accordingly.

The mahout was provided with immense bags, in which he was accustomed to carry the elephant's provender; these were slung over the animal's back, the jars were brought forth, and the coin was consigned to those sacks. But the Hindu, though an honest, good-tempered fellow, was not altogether without the characteristic cunning of his race, and in order to prevent the coins from jingling in the bags, he expertly put thin layers of grass and large leaves. In a short time the sacks were filled to the extent which the mahout thought the elephant could conveniently bear, and the remainder of the coin was secured about the persons of the two men.

They now set out together, both mounted upon the elephant, and the Burker was rejoiced to find that the mahout's way was in quite the contrary direction from the town where he had seen the horrible tortures administered, and whence he had been scared off by the warning of the police official. The Hindu endeavoured to make the Burker understand the destination for which he was bound and the length of the journey which he had to perform, but the Englishman's acquaintance with Hindustani was much too limited to enable him to comprehend his new friend's meaning. It was however sufficient for the Burker that he had at length fallen in with one who seemed friendly disposed toward him, and who had an identical interest with his own, so to speak, in reference to the treasure whereof they had obtained possession.

In a few hours a town became visible in the distance, and the travellers reached a point where the road branched off

into two, one leading direct toward that town. The mahout guided the elephant into the diverging road, making signs to the Burker that it would be prudent to avoid the town, for fear lest the secret of the treasure should be discovered. They presently halted at a farmhouse, where the mahout displayed some document which he carried about with him, and the presentation of this paper at once ensured the two travellers a hospitable reception. The Burker therefore concluded that the elephant and its driver belonged to some high authority, whose hands had furnished the passport which thus commanded friendly treatment.

At that farmhouse they remained during the sultriest hours of the day, the mahout keeping his eye continuously upon the elephant, so as to prevent any person about the premises from detecting the secret of the treasure; nor did it appear to excite any astonishment that he would not suffer the animal to be relieved from the burden which he carried. Toward evening the journey was renewed, and it was continued until about an hour after dusk, when another halt was made at a village, or, rather, large hamlet, consisting of about three dozen wretched hovels. Here the presentation of the passport secured for the elephant the only stable that was to be found in the place, and the mahout took care that no one else should be present when he and the Burker relieved the animal from its load. Having furnished the elephant with provender, and locked up the stable, the mahout, followed by the Englishman, proceeded to the khan, where an ample meal was provided from the residence of the mayor of the village. A flask of good liquor accompanied it; the Hindu and the Englishman ate and drank to their hearts' content, and the more the latter saw of the former the better he liked him. Presently the native produced pipes and tobacco, a luxury of which the Burker gladly availed himself; but he had not smoked long when he felt as if his head were swimming around, the pipe dropped from his hand, and he sank upon the bench in the unconsciousness of profound slumber.

When he awoke in the morning, he was some time before he could collect his ideas, but when his memory began to grow settled, an idea of treachery on the part of the mahout swept through his brain. This appeared to receive a terrible confirmation when, on looking around, he discovered that

he was alone. He was on the point of giving way to his rage, when he felt that the money he had secured about his person was still all in safety there, and in a few moments the mahout made his appearance. The Burker's countenance instantaneously cleared up, while the native burst out into a merry peal of laughter, at the same time pointing to the broken pipe which lay upon the floor, and tapping his head significantly. The Burker comprehended his friend's meaning, which was to the effect that the tobacco had proved too strong for him. The mahout had been to look after his elephant; a good meal was now brought in from the mayor's cottage, and the Burker did all the more justice to the provisions, inasmuch as his mind was relieved from the cruel apprehension which for a moment had smitten it, and he now felt that the completest reliance could be placed in the integrity of his companion.

The journey was resumed, and for two or three hours the road lay through a tract of country where habitations were to be seen only at very distant intervals. At length, at about midday, when the heat of the sun was growing of an intolerable sultriness, a halt was made at a farmhouse at no great distance from a town which appeared to be of considerable extent. The Hindu, however, gave the Burker to understand that the town would be avoided when their journey was resumed. The passport, as heretofore, ensured the travellers a welcome reception on the part of the native and his family who inhabited the farmhouse, and still the mahout looked carefully after his elephant.

They had not been half an hour at this farmhouse, when half a dozen horsemen were seen advancing, and the Burker felt somewhat uncomfortable on recognizing the uniforms of the peons, or policemen. He fancied likewise, by the aspect of the mahout, that this individual would rather have avoided the company into which he was about to be thrown. The peons came up, dismounted from their horses, and led them into the stable to which the elephant had been consigned. Just within the doorway of the stable the mahout and the Burker had posted themselves, and they were at the time partaking of the provisions so bounteously furnished by the occupants of the farmhouse.

The peons looked suspiciously at the Burker, but the mahout hastened to say something, which produced a change

in their aspect, and the native himself went on conversing with the newcomers in a friendly manner. The peons proceeded to stable their horses, while the mahout glanced anxiously at the Burker and then at his elephant, so that he was evidently uneasy in respect to the secret of the treasure. One of the peons, while attending to his horse, happened to knock his elbow with some degree of severity against the sack that was nearest, — the burden having remained upon the elephant's back, for the mahout had feared that if he and the Burker removed it, its exceeding weight would have excited the suspicions of the inhabitants of the farmhouse. The peon, evidently astonished at the hardness of the contents of that sack, proceeded, with a curiosity that was natural enough, to feel the bag with his hand, and he soon discovered that it was filled with coin. An ejaculation made known this discovery to his companions, and, abandoning their horses, they hastened to the spot.

The mahout flung upon the Burker a glance which was as much as to imply that all their presence of mind would now be needed, and then, with a remarkable self-possession on his own part, he hastened to give the peons some explanation. What this was, the Burker could not understand, but it evidently required to be backed by some corroborative testimony, for the mahout, producing his passport, or whatever the official document were, displayed it to the peons. They looked at each other, and shook their heads dubiously. The Burker felt that a storm was about to burst, and he was taught another moral, to the effect that the possession of riches does not always ensure the contentment, happiness, and safety of their owner. Indeed this moral was very energetically illustrated when the peons seized upon himself and the elephant driver.

The mahout protested vehemently against this proceeding, and with so much appearance of truthfulness on his side that the Burker could scarcely believe he had told a tissue of falsehoods to account for the bags being filled with coin, though he had indeed done so. The peons were, however, incredulous, and while some of them retained the Burker and the mahout in their custody, the others proceeded to examine the sacks. When they found that these contained such a vast quantity of treasure, and that the coins themselves were blackened with age, they were more remote than

ever from giving credit to the tale, whatever it were, which the elephant-driver had told them. A personal examination, moreover, made them aware that the two prisoners had large amounts of similar coin concealed amongst their garments, and therefore the minds of the police officials were made up relative to the course which they should pursue. This was communicated to the mahout, who furtively flung upon his English companion anything but a pleasant look. Some of the tenants of the homestead now gathered at the stable door, and the Burker saw that himself and his comrade in misfortune were looked upon with a very evil eye, as if indeed they were a couple of arrant knaves and thieves, or even worse.

To be brief, when the sultry hours had passed away and, evening was approaching, the cavalcade was put in motion; the peons took charge of the elephant, the mahout and the Burker were conducted as prisoners to that town which they had already seen in the neighbourhood. On arriving there, the captives were led into the presence of an officer of the peons, and the mahout told his story, at the same time producing his passport. We should observe that all the coin which he and the Burker had about their persons was already taken possession of by the peons at the farmhouse.

The officer of the peons listened with attention, and when the mahout had finished, he addressed a few words to the Burker. This individual gave the official to understand that he was not acquainted with the Hindustani tongue, but a native interpreter was speedily forthcoming. Through this medium the Burker was desired to explain what he knew of the circumstances that had led to the arrest of himself and his companion. He felt horribly perplexed. What tale could he possibly tell? How could he render it consistent with that which the mahout had already told, and of the nature of which he was in the profoundest ignorance? Something, however, must be said, and the Burker was not very long at a loss upon the subject. He accordingly declared that he had fallen in with the mahout on the previous day, that the elephant-driver had given him a lift upon his animal, and that as the bags were too plethoric with their metallic contents, he had been asked as a favour to carry a portion about his person. The Burker was then desired to account for the fact that two small bags of new rupees had been found

upon him, for it was intimated that his personal appearance did not warrant the idea that he possessed any such resources of his own, or at least did not justify the belief that he had honestly come by them. Thinking that the money would never be restored to him, and that he had better boldly renounce all ownership of it, the Burker declared that the two bags of new rupees had likewise been entrusted to him by the mahout. When all these statements were interpreted to the officer of peons, the elephant-driver bent a look of reproach upon the Burker, evidently to accuse him of the blackest ingratitude in endeavouring to shift all the blame from his own shoulders to those of his companion. It was quite clear to the Englishman that his statements were completely at variance with those made by the mahout, for the examining police official shook his head incredulously, and issued some order to his underlings. This mandate was promptly obeyed, for the Burker and the elephant-driver were hurried into an adjacent room, and here the horrified eyes of the Englishman fell upon implements of torture similar to those which he had seen at the town whence he was expelled with so significant a warning. As for the mahout, he folded his arms and contemplated the torture-instruments with a courageous resignation.

The Burker was the first to be subjected to the torturing process, the interpreter standing near to receive whatsoever revelations might be extracted from his lips. The *kittee* was applied to his fingers; the excruciation was exquisite, and under the influence thereof he confessed the whole truth in respect to the discovery of the buried treasure. With regard to the two bags of rupees, — which, as the reader will recollect, were obtained by the murder of the ryot, — the Burker declared that he had found them on the person of a gossoon who was killed by a tiger.

The mahout was next subjected to the torture, and the truth was speedily elicited from his lips. It was now found that the two tales corresponded, but by way of punishing the prisoners, a severe beating was inflicted upon them with sticks and whips. The Burker howled horribly; the Hindu exhibited far more courage in enduring the chastisement. The officer of peons then pronounced a decision in the case, which was duly interpreted to the Burker. It was to the effect that the treasure which had been found belonged

to the government, and should be appropriated accordingly; that with regard to the two bags of new rupees found upon the Burker himself, he had no right to self-appropriate the money belonging to the gossoon who was killed by the tiger, and that therefore all such moneys should be devoted to public charity (or, in other words, would go into the pockets of the peons themselves). Lastly, it was ordained that both the prisoners should be set at liberty, with free permission to pursue their ways, the mahout having the elephant restored to him.

The Burker, on being released, slunk out of the torture-room, not daring to meet the indignant looks of his late companion, with whom he felt all friendship to be completely at an end. Thus, with an empty wallet at his back, and not the smallest coin in his pocket, the Englishman found himself once more a friendless outcast and forlorn wanderer in that land where the most terrible calamities had already befallen him. His fingers were cruelly swollen with the application of the *kittee;* his body was all bruised and his limbs stiffened with the fustigation he had received. It was night, and he dragged himself painfully through the streets of the town. He looked about for the public khan, and after awhile succeeded in finding it. But it was occupied by a number of gossoons and other travellers of the lowest class, and he beheld little sympathy in their looks, though he gave them to understand that he was hungry and foodless. One of the gossoons, happening to notice his swollen fingers, ejaculated a few words, amongst which *kittee* was the only one that was intelligible to the Burker's ears, and the whole assembly burst forth into a loud laugh. At length a snake-charmer, who had his basket of cobras near him, taking compassion upon the wretched Englishman, gave him a portion of his rice, and the Burker, retreating into the darkest corner, devoured the meal with avidity. He then lay down to sleep, and when morning dawned, he wakened to a renewed sense of his utter loneliness, his complete friendlessness, his hopeless, miserable condition.

To the snake-charmer he was indebted for another meal; he then issued from the khan, but as he was threading the street, he met the interpreter who had officiated on the previous evening. This individual gave him to understand that if he were wise he would not be seen loitering about the

town, and he accordingly profited by this counsel. He left the place, resuming his wanderings in the open country. Again did despair seize upon him, but still he had not the courage to put an end to his miseries by means of suicide. By degrees he began to buoy himself up with the hope that something might yet transpire to refill his pocket, in which case he was resolved to act more prudently than he had hitherto done. He bitterly repented his unhandsome conduct toward the elephant-driver, inasmuch as this individual, naturally generous-hearted, might have befriended him had he only remained stanch when the examination was over. But it was too late to regret that which could not be recalled, and the Burker was taught another severe lesson relative to the disastrous consequences of iniquitous behaviour toward one's fellow creatures.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DANCERS

BENEATH the rays of the burning Indian sun, that outcast European toiled upon his way. Since he escaped from prisonage in the royal city of Inderabad, what adventures had he experienced, what perils had he passed through, what sights had he witnessed! If suddenly some good genius or friendly hand had transported him back to his native clime, what a book could he have written of his experiences of Indian life! He had been cast into the midst of all the worst and most hideous phases of that Oriental existence, as if he had been flung into a morass swarming with reptiles. He had seen the combats of wild beasts, he had listened to the crashing of bones when circled by the deadly folds of the monster snake, he had lain down to rest amidst the haunts of serpents, he had battled with Stranglers, he had been the associate of the gossoon, he had penetrated into the secret treasure-chamber of the once proud pagan temple, he had witnessed and endured the torture inflicted by the native officials under the sanction of the British authorities. Yes, what a volume could this man have written had he possessed the ability and were he placed in a position to do so! But what was to be his doom? What destiny was in store for him? Had it been typified in any horrible occurrence which he himself had witnessed, or was some new phase of hideous excruciation to develop itself to seal the fate of that man of a thousand misdeeds?

After he quitted the town he was, as we have seen, for awhile a prey to despair; but his was one of those resolute, dogged, callous souls, a soul so tanned, hardened, and petrified by an existence of peril and of crime, that it was scarcely probable he would long abandon himself to despondency

when no immediate danger was staring him in the face. Thus was it that homeless, friendless, foodless, and moneyless though he were, he still found something worth living for; he even entertained the hope that things might mend, and that accident would again turn up some advantage for him especially to reap.

He continued his way until the heat was growing intolerable, and then he approached a farmhouse for the purpose of soliciting refuge and refreshment. He was however driven away by several native labourers, who liked not his appearance, and his wanderings were continued. Presently he reached a long avenue of trees overshadowing a stream, beyond which stretched the undulating fields, and he fancied that he heard the sounds of female voices. He drew nearer; he looked through the trees, and he beheld a number of dusky native girls disporting in the water. They were in a completely nude condition, though the greater portion of their forms was immersed in the streamlet. All of them were exceedingly beautiful, and the Englishman was struck by the admirable modelling of the contours of the busts. Their long, jetty hair, now shining with the gloss of moisture, floated over their sculptural shoulders and down their backs, and their dark eyes acquired an additional lustre from the pearly drops which hung to the long ebon lashes and glistened in the sunbeams that penetrated through the openings in the trees. They were gamboling and disporting as if they were the dusky naiads of their own native rivers, now diving down to the depths of the stream, now plunging in their heads, and then smoothing their hair to wring out the water, now spattering and splashing each other, and all the while laughing and chatting merrily. It was an interesting scene, but the Burker viewed it only with eyes that gloated upon the charms which were revealed, and with an imagination that grew more and more inflamed with desire.

A little farther along the stream, a number of young men were bathing, and they likewise were disporting in the water. The Burker did not immediately catch sight of them, so intent was he on feasting his eyes with the former spectacle which we have described. But at length he heard some of the girls calling to the young men, and the latter answering, so that he was thus led to surmise they all belonged to the same party.

Presently the young women began, one after another, to ascend from the stream, and slowly to resume their apparel. The Burker, still remaining concealed from their observation, watched them with devouring eyes, and slowly the thought crept into his mind that he had before seen two or three of those handsome feminine countenances. Perhaps the idea itself was engendered by the nature of the garb which the girls were putting on, for this apparel was at least familiar to him. Yes, there could be no doubt: it was the troupe of dancers whom he had seen in the jungle, when he had watched them from the interior of the cave, and when the tiger, springing from the thicket, had seized upon the snake-charmer at the very moment his limbs were encircled by the fangless reptiles.

The Burker had noticed in the jungle, and the impression was now confirmed, that there was a considerable degree of good-humour, kindness, and friendly familiarity in the bearing of those dancers toward each other, the male as well as the female, and he began to think it was by no means improbable that they would suffer him to join them. He however felt that it would scarcely prove a passport to their favour if he were discovered peering in through the trees upon their ablutionary recreations, and he therefore retreated to a more respectful distance. There he sat down, and awaited till they should come forth from beneath the shade of the spot that they had selected for their bath.

In a few minutes the girls made their appearance in a body, and not perceiving the Burker, they began practising a dance, in a style similar to that which he had witnessed from the cavern in the jungle. There was the same elegance of motion, combined with wantonness of look, the same study to poetize in the dance all the most sensuous feelings of which human nature is susceptible, the same system of appeal, by gestures, by attitudes, and by the expression of countenances, to the libidinous imagination. The young men joined them, and the dance was continued, until all being exhausted they sat down upon the grass. Then baskets of provisions were produced, and the Burker thought it high time to introduce himself to the notice of those whom he hoped to be permitted to join as a hanger-on in some capacity or another, even though it were as the porter of those very baskets the contents of which reminded him that he was hungry.

Notwithstanding the revolting ugliness of his looks, there was about the Burker an air of so much misery, mingled with so earnest an appeal to the humanity of these natives, that they, naturally good-hearted, at once gave him a sort of welcome, and sitting down near them, he received a considerable ration of provender. While he was eating, the natives whispered together; then they addressed themselves to him, but they soon found that he was unable to comprehend much of their own language. They however succeeded in conveying to him the assurance that if he were a friendless and unfortunate man, they would allow him to be a sort of follower in their company, that he might carry a portion of their baggage, and that he should at least be certain of obtaining a meal. Perhaps, amidst their good-natured inclinations, was blended the somewhat more selfish consideration that the presence of a European attached to their company would be calculated to excite sympathy and augment the amount of their usual receipts.

After having rested for some hours in the shade of the trees, the party put itself in motion, and proceeding across a fertile and beautiful tract of country, reached a large town shortly after nightfall. Here the men took up their quarters at the public khan, but the females found a lodging at some private house in the neighbourhood. On the following morning the males and females formed company again, and they commenced their avocations in the public thoroughfares, choosing those places that were overlooked by the handsomest and most imposing habitations. There were several English residents in this town, and as the Burker was put forward to receive the contributions of the spectators, he was speedily accosted by some of his fellow countrymen. It was the first time for a considerable period that he had thus conversed with any one belonging to his own native land, and even with such a wretch as this, there was a certain pleasurable feeling in the circumstance. He had a tale ready prepared, for he was naturally anxious to avoid the slightest hint that might lead to his identification with the individual who had escaped from captivity in Inderabad. He told a story of shipwreck, of his sole survivorship from the catastrophe, of long and painful wanderings, of the miseries he had endured, and of the kindness which he experienced on the part of those natives with whom he was now

connected. The result was that rupees showered in upon him, and the donations were all the more liberal on account of the favourable representations which he made in respect to the troupe of dancers whom he accompanied. A few hours sufficed for the reaping of a considerable pecuniary harvest, and on his return to the khan, the Burker feasted in a sumptuous manner with the male portion of the company.

For about three weeks he travelled with his new friends, and they had no reason to regret the kindness they had in the first instance bestowed upon him, for, as they had foreseen, their ordinary receipts were trebled and quadrupled. He soon found that the dancing girls were as profligate as they were beautiful; they had their paramours, almost indiscriminately, amongst their male companions, and they readily sold themselves to any individuals amongst the spectators whom they might chance to please. The Burker beheld scenes which excited his own desires almost to a perfect frenzy, but if ever he himself made the slightest advance toward any of the Hindu girls, his overture was received with a peal of laughter. At some of the towns where they stopped the girls were hired to dance at private parties given by wealthy natives, and it was seldom on such occasions that some of them failed to captivate a few of the male guests, — the result being profitable to the beautiful but unprincipled females who thus readily bartered their charms for gold.

Money poured in so fast that the itinerants were enabled to add many comforts to the little movable property which they had previously possessed. They purchased, amongst other things, a couple of tents, and thus during their journeys they were enabled to erect their temporary habitations in the most pleasant spots which they reached. They lived luxuriously; they replenished their wardrobes, but they would not permit the Burker to change his own travel-soiled costume for a better one, because they had found by experience that the more miserable his appearance the greater was the sympathy of the public. In all other respects he profited equally with themselves in the pecuniary harvest which they reaped in every town, village, or hamlet where they stopped, and he was treated with exceeding kindness by his companions.

There was one of the girls whose beauty transcended that of all the others. She was tall and superbly formed, her whole appearance reminding the Burker of Indora's ayah, the deceased Sagoonah. This dancing-girl of whom we are speaking made a deep impression upon the Englishman, or rather, we should say, her beauty excited his imagination to a pitch that was almost intolerable. She had a paramour, perhaps two or three, amongst the male members of the company, and she was likewise a special favourite amongst those libertines who in the towns intrigued with the dancing-girls. The Burker on two or three occasions, when under the influence of liquor, had seized opportunities to throw amorous looks upon this girl, but she had invariably responded with a peal of merry laughter. There was nothing scornful nor derisive in it; it was only the joyous, careless merriment of a female who found herself solicited by a very unlovable being, — a being whose ugliness imparted a ludicrousness to any overtures coming from such a quarter. But even when she thus laughed she looked all the more handsome, for her red lips revealed two rows of teeth which, though somewhat large, were as white as ivory and faultlessly even, while at the same time the hilarity of her thoughts infused additional lustre into her large, black, mischievous eyes. The costume which she wore, and which was similar to that of her female companions, displayed the contours of the bust most voluptuously, and the Burker was wont to feast his eyes upon those charms until at last he felt that he must do something desperate in order to gratify his passion.

We have already said that the itinerants had purchased tents, and these, during their journeys, were erected for four or five hours each afternoon, when the heat of the sun rendered travelling impossible. One day the tents were set up in the midst of a field of soft, sweet grass, and at a little distance there was a meandering stream. The itinerants proposed that there should be a general bathing, but the Burker refused to be one of the party, for knowing that there were alligators in the rivers of Hindustan, he shuddered at the idea of committing his person to those treacherous waters. He therefore remained in one of the tents, while all his male companions proceeded to the river.

Now, it happened that the very dancing-girl of whom he

had become so much enamoured declined for some reason or another to accompany her female friends to the spot where they were to refresh themselves with immersion in the stream. She remained in the other tent, entirely ignorant that the Burker was in the adjacent one, as he likewise was unaware that she had also stayed behind. He was reclining upon the grass inside the tent, thinking of that girl, suffering his imagination to gloat upon her charms, when the sound of her voice was wafted to his ears. She was singing. Her voice was a beautiful one; it was full of melody, and even so hardened, callous, and imbruted a soul as that of the Burker was touched by its harmony. He rose from the grass; he advanced to the entrance of the tent, and he listened. He knew the voice, and it struck him that the girl might be alone. Creeping cautiously to the tent which she occupied, he lay down flat upon his face, lifted the canvas an inch or two, and peeped in. The girl was changing her apparel, singing to herself the while, unsuspicious of impending danger.

The Burker felt that this was his opportunity. The spectacle which he beheld of that half-naked female maddened him to a degree that if the most hideous death were to prove the inevitable consequence he could not restrain himself. All of a sudden he appeared at the entrance of the tent. The Hindu girl was for a moment startled, and for a moment frightened, too, at the sinister gloating looks of the English hanger-on of the company, but quickly recovering her self-possession, she smiled in a deprecating manner, as much as to bid him observe that he was taking a liberty. At the same time, with a movement as languid as her sense of modesty was slight, she threw a garment over the bust that was previously exposed in all its voluptuous nakedness; and as the Burker still lingered, she now made him a more imperative sign to withdraw. Instead of obeying her, he rushed forward and seized her in his arms. She did not scream out, but with all the elasticity of the serpent, — a suppleness which served her even better than mere physical strength would have done, — she in a moment disengaged herself from his embrace, gliding out of it as it were, in a manner which he himself could scarcely comprehend. In the twinkling of an eye she was at the farther extremity of the tent, and thinking that the Burker would be satisfied with this

repulse, she smiled good-humouredly, entreating him at the same time in her own native language to withdraw. But the garment which she had thrown over her shoulders remained in the Burker's arms, as if it were the mere phantom of the substantial, warm, and glowing shape which for an instant those arms had retained in their fervid pressure. Maddened by the spectacle of her nude beauties, he rushed forward again, but the girl eluded him, and darting forth from the tent, she sped toward her female companions, who were bathing in the river at a little distance from the male members of the troupe.

A terrible execration burst from the lips of the Burker as he rushed after her, but she was soon far ahead, and he stopped short. He now cursed himself for what he had done; he was afraid lest he should draw down upon his head the vindictive rage of the girl's friends. He stood irresolute how to act, but not long did he remain thus undecided, for in a few minutes he beheld the whole company, male and female, rushing toward him. They were but partially dressed; they had evidently hurried out of the water at the hasty entreaties of the girl. The Burker fled precipitately.

Away he ran across the fields, some of the men pursuing him, and shouting in vindictive accents. The Burker ran for his life; never perhaps had he put forth such speed. Glancing over his shoulder, he found to his delight that he was distancing his pursuers, until at length they were no longer within the range of his vision.

But now he was once more a solitary wanderer. By an act of infatuated madness he had all in a moment severed the ties which connected him with a number of beings who were veritably his friends, and in whose company he had enjoyed personal security, luxurious living, and cheerful society. He cursed himself over and over again for his unmitigated folly; he even thought of retracing his steps and grovelling upon his knees to implore forgiveness, but he dreaded lest he should fall a victim to those darker qualities of the Hindu character which his conduct had excited. He therefore continued his way, and in about an hour he reached a village, where he purchased some rice, for he had a few rupees in his pocket. Proceeding to the khan, he cooked his provisions, and passed the night there, he being the only tenant of the place.

For the next three or four days he wandered on without experiencing any adventure worthy of note, but entertaining the hope that something would turn up to relieve him from these solitary peregrinations. He observed at the different towns and hamlets where he stopped, or through which he passed, that there were no officials in the Anglo-Indian uniform, and he therefore concluded that his wandering steps had again led him into the dominions of some independent prince. This was a subject for rejoicing, inasmuch as he had sore remembrance of the torture-chambers that he had witnessed, but, on the other hand, he dreaded lest he should by any possibility have entered the boundaries of Queen Indora's realm.

His money was now all gone; the last coin had been expended upon food, and nothing had transpired to afford him fresh companionship or to promise a pecuniary resource. It was early one morning that, having slept at a khan in a large village, the Burker was journeying along a road, when he beheld an elephant advancing from the opposite direction. It was conducted by a mahout, and as it drew nearer, the Burker recognized the very individual to whom he had behaved so unhandsomely. His first impulse was to turn out of the road, and strike into the fields, but a second thought induced him to proceed. He recollected the good-tempered character of the mahout; he felt assured that he was not vindictive, and he reasoned within himself that even if the Hindu would do him no good, he would not wreak upon him any evil.

As the elephant advanced, the mahout recognized the Burker, and he stopped the animal. The Englishman looked appealingly; the Hindu seemed irresolute how to act, until at length his natural kindness prevailed, and he extended his hand in token of forgiveness. The Burker eagerly grasped it, and the mahout, seeking the shade of some neighbouring trees, produced his provisions. He and the Burker sat down together, while the elephant wandered to a little distance, and as the two men ate and drank, the Hindu made signs to intimate that the Burker's appearance was a miserable one. While the mahout was gazing upon his English companion, a singular change gradually came over his countenance; some idea seemed to be settling into consistency in his brain, and the Burker could not compre-

hend what was thus passing in his thoughts. Suddenly producing a newspaper, the mahout turned to a particular column, referred to some announcement there, and then again studied the appearance of the Burker. The idea which he had entertained now seemed to be confirmed, and he placed the newspaper in the Burker's hand. It was printed in the Hindustani language; there were two or three columns of advertisements, and at the head of several the Burker beheld the name of "Inderabad." But the mahout pointed to a particular advertisement, and though the Burker could not comprehend it, yet he felt persuaded that it related to himself.

The mahout laid his finger upon that special announcement, and then pointed significantly to the Burker himself. The Englishman was seized with terror lest the mahout, who was well armed, should endeavour to hand him over to the grasp of justice, but the good-natured Hindu vehemently made reassuring signs. The Burker pointed to the word "Inderabad;" the mahout slowly waved his arm all around, as much as to imply that as far as the vision could reach it was the domain of Queen Indora. He then rose from his seat upon the grass, and placing a few small coins in the Burker's hand, made signs to show that they must part. He called his elephant, which at once obeyed the summons, and when mounted on the animal's back, he pointed in a particular direction, thereby intimating that it was toward that point the Burker must journey if he wished to pass beyond the limits of Indora's kingdom.

The mahout continued his route, leaving the Burker again all friendless and lonely. The wretched Englishman watched the colossal elephant and the kind-hearted Hindu till they were out of sight, and more bitterly than ever did he deplore his ungenerous conduct toward one who in other circumstances would evidently have proved so stanch a friend. It was but too plain that his recent apprehensions were well founded, and that he was once more a wanderer within the limits of Queen Indora's dominions. It was likewise evident that his escape had been advertised in the journals of that kingdom, and that a reward had been offered for his recapture. The mahout had indicated the direction which he was to take in order to place himself in safety, and he therefore lost no time in following that friendly suggestion.

He journeyed on with rapidity, and for about an hour pursued his way through tracts of country the excellent culture of which, together with the smiling hamlets and neat villages, indicated the prosperity enjoyed by Queen Indora's subjects. The farmhouses were infinitely superior to those which the Burker had seen in the Anglo-Indian territories, and, in a word, there was every indication of a truly paternal government in its most substantial realities, and not in the delusions of a fiction.

The Burker, we said, had journeyed for about an hour after parting from the friendly mahout, when he reached a broad road lined with trees on either side. The immense avenue presented a most grateful shade, but not for many minutes had the Burker paused to rest himself there when his ear caught the sounds of some approaching cavalcade. He looked in the direction whence those sounds came, and he beheld banners floating at the extremity of the avenue. He hastened to conceal himself in the midst of a knot of shrubs which grew between the more stately trees, and he felt assured that he had chosen a hiding-place impenetrable to the gaze of even the keenest observer.

The procession advanced. First came a squadron of about five hundred cavalry, consisting of native troops, but apparelled in a uniform very much resembling that of British lancers. They were all fine men, and the high plumes which waved about their heads gave them the appearance of a towering stature as they defiled slowly along the avenue. They were all mounted upon splendid steeds, and in front of them were borne the banners which had first met the Burker's eye. Immediately behind this squadron of cavalry advanced a number of sumpter-horses, attended by some fifty menials, apparelled in uniform of a less martial description than that of their precursors. Then came twelve trumpeters, splendidly attired and all bestriding bright bay steeds. Next appeared six elephants, with magnificent castles upon their backs, and in these castles were seated a bevy of young and beautiful ladies, all richly apparelled, and evidently belonging to the household of some great personage who was yet to appear in the procession. The elephants were followed by twelve handsomely apparelled gentlemen, mounted upon beautiful horses, and these individuals likewise appeared to belong to the establishment

of a higher personage who was yet to come within the range of the concealed observer's vision. Those gentlemen in the glittering court dresses were followed by two light waggons, each drawn by six horses, and on which lay the apparatus for the erection of two superb pavilions. Then came a carriage drawn by six milk-white steeds, whose flowing tails nearly touched the ground. Nothing could exceed the magnificence of their caparisons, and over each one was thrown a rich brocade, embroidered with gold flowers, the delicate texture serving to keep off the insects from the animals. Three postilions, in light, elegant liveries, guided that splendid team. The carriage was of corresponding elegance, richness, and beauty. It was lightly constructed, and had a canopy with blue satin curtains, all embroidered in gold. If the reader will picture to himself a canopy, fixed by means of four upright slender shafts of solid silver upon an open English chariot, he may form an idea of the nature of the arrangements of this elegant vehicle.

But who occupied that carriage? From all the former part of the procession which had passed like a gorgeous panorama before him, the concealed Englishman was prepared to behold Queen Indora and her royal husband, that object of all her love whom she had elevated to become the sharer of her mighty and magnificent dominion. And truly, the King and Queen of Inderabad were the occupants of that beautiful equipage. He whom the reader has known as Bertram Vivian, or Clement Redcliffe, or Lord Clandon, was seated in that carriage, by the side of his queenly wife. He wore an Oriental costume, for he had judiciously deemed it prudent to identify himself with the habits and customs of the country which, in sweet partnership with Indora, he was called upon to govern. About his person were the insignia of his kingly office, and if ever there were an instance in which, as an exception to the general rule, the natives of India had reason to bless the presence and the authority of an Englishman, it was in the case of the inhabitants of Inderabad with regard to this monarch who ruled them so wisely and so well. And never perhaps had he of whom we are speaking appeared to greater advantage during this medium period of his life. Time seemed to sit lightly upon him, and, in the vigour of his prime, yet did he look several years younger still.

And Indora, who sat by his side, how gloriously handsome was she! What grand and gorgeous beauty had the people of Inderabad to admire in the person of their queen! Her countenance was radiant with happiness as she looked proudly and fondly upon the husband whom she had raised to a throne; and he likewise was happy, for if anything could compensate him for the blight of his first love, it was the wondrous devotion which had been displayed by her who had taught his heart to love a second time.

The procession passed on, another squadron of five hundred lancers closing the rear. The Burker beheld it all from his hiding-place, where his presence remained unsuspected, and before the brilliant panorama faded like a magnificent vision from his view, he heard the clarions, the trumpets, and the horns sending their loud metallic notes in tuneful harmony along the avenue. At length those sounds died away in the distance; the procession was no longer to be seen, and the Burker came forth from his hiding-place.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CATASTROPHE

The Englishman pursued his wanderings, and when night came he still continued his way, for he dared not enter any village, for fear lest he should be recognized as the individual advertised in the journals of the kingdom. At an isolated cottage, however, he had obtained some food, for which he had offered to pay, but the occupants of the tenement had refused a reward for that which they gave from purest motives of charity. All night long did the Englishman wander, following however as well as he could recollect the direction which the friendly mahout had pointed out. He knew that wild beasts prowled at night time, and thus he walked and walked in continuous terror, startled by the rustling of every bough, and frightened by the echoes of his own footsteps. Still he felt it were better to dare any peril rather than incur the risk of being recaptured by the officials of the kingdom.

When morning dawned, the wretched man was still dragging himself along, wondering when he should reach the limits of that kingdom, and by what indication he might obtain the assurance that he was beyond the territory of Inderabad. At another isolated cottage he obtained a meal, and again was it given him in charity, again was the reward which he offered rejected. How different would it have been anywhere in the Anglo-Indian possessions! So true it is that humane and liberal rulers model the sentiments of the people into humanity and liberality, while, on the other hand, rapacious and hard-hearted authorities afford an example which tends to warp the national character with sentiments of rapaciousness, selfishness, and uncharitableness.

For three or four days the Burker wandered on, without experiencing any adventure worthy of particular notice. He continued to receive eleemosynary charity, without finding the proffered recompense accepted, until one evening he reached a small farmhouse where in return for the meal that was furnished him a high price was exacted. Now although the Burker was but little accustomed to regard matters in reference to the amenities of social considerations, it nevertheless occurred to him that he had entered upon a different province. He had by this time picked up quite a sufficiency of the Hindustani language to be enabled to put the question, — that question which hitherto he had not dared to put for fear of exciting suspicion. He however gave utterance to it now, and he comprehended the answer. He was no longer within the limits of Queen Indora's kingdom, and therefore in respect to her jurisdiction he felt himself safe. He endeavoured to ascertain in what district of India he actually was, but all he could make out was to the effect that he was not within the English possessions.

He pursued his way, now walking with less rapidity, and wondering what would happen next to him in the catalogue of adventures which he appeared destined to experience beneath the burning sun of Hindustan. He had not proceeded very far before he reached an isolated cottage, where he resolved to beg a shelter for the night. He knocked at the door, and it was opened by a fierce-looking native, who surveyed him suspiciously in the clear starlight. This individual was about fifty years of age; his complexion was more swarthy than that of the natives generally; he had a short, curling beard, and this, as well as his hair, was grizzled. From beneath his loose garments a brace of huge pistols peeped forth, and there was a dagger stuck without concealment in his belt.

The Burker began to plead piteously for a night's lodging calling to his aid all the words of the Hindustani language which he could possibly muster, but the swarthy-faced man, after eying him suspiciously for nearly a minute, banged the door in his face. The Burker dared not renew his application, nor make any demonstration of his rage, for the weapons possessed by the uncouth individual left the Englishman completely at a disadvantage. He was, however, so much fatigued that, on dragging himself to a little dis-

tance, he sank down, completely exhausted, and strong though his energies naturally were, he had not the power to raise himself, nor even the courage to make the attempt.

It was on a grassy bank, by the side of a little streamlet, that he had thus fallen, and the opposite side of the road was thrown into a dense shade by a line of trees. In a few minutes the Burker felt somewhat refreshed, or at all events his faintness had passed off, and he was about to raise himself up to his feet, when his ear caught the sounds of the trampling of horses' hoofs. They appeared to come from the direction of the cottage, and thitherward he looked. He beheld three horses being led around from the back part of the cottage, no doubt from a stable in the rear of the little building. Two men were thus leading them, and a third appeared at the door of the cottage. The starlight was sufficiently brilliant and the Burker was near enough to perceive that this individual who came forth from the habitation was the same who had so rudely banged the door in his face.

The three men mounted the horses, but previous to taking their departure, one of them — he whom the Burker had so vainly appealed to — issued some instructions to a female who appeared upon the threshold. The woman replied in a few words, and the men slowly rode away. They were approaching the spot where the Englishman was lying upon the grass; he had already formed but a very indifferent idea of the characters of individuals who could afford to keep horses and who yet frequented such a comparatively wretched hovel; indeed, he took them to be desperadoes of some sort or another, and he therefore fancied that they were quite capable of putting an end to his existence if they had any reason to suspect that he was watching them. He curled himself up, as it were, with his face downward, at the same time getting as much beneath the shade of the bank as possible, and the horsemen passed him by without noticing his presence. The Burker suffered them to get to a considerable distance before he rose to his feet, and then he began to reflect at leisure upon the circumstances which had just occurred. He thought that inasmuch as the man had given parting instructions to the woman, she was, most probably, the only person left in the cottage. The men had most likely gone forth for some considerable time, at all events for an hour or two, and the idea was strong in

the Burker's mind that he had seen the commencement of an adventure which it was worth while to carry out. He drew nearer to the cottage; he crept up to the window, he listened, but heard no voices speaking. He made the circuit of the building; it was a very small one, and the more closely he inspected it, the meaner was its appearance. He again posted himself at the window, and through a crevice he could now obtain a view of the interior of the apartment.

The only occupant thereof was an old woman, the redness of whose blear eyes was thrown out into horrible relief by the swarthiness of her complexion. Her mouth had completely fallen in, through the loss of teeth; her nose and chin, which must always have been prominent, even in her youth, appeared nearly to meet. Her hair, which was gray, hung straight down her back; her form was bowed, and her hands trembled with age as she lifted the food to her lips, for she was at supper. The table had evidently been spread with an excellent banquet, with the remnants of which she was now enjoying herself. Enough of the provender however remained to convince the Burker that such diet was inconsistent with the mean appearance of the cottage, and he was thus confirmed in his opinion that the three cavaliers did not earn their living by means which they could honourably and frankly explain to the authorities of the country in which they dwelt.

The old woman kept on eating and eating, ever and anon having recourse to the contents of a bottle which the Burker felt assured must furnish something very potent, for at each draught the hag's eyes grew more inflamed. At length she made an end of her repast, and having leisurely cleared the table, she knelt down in one corner where an old mattress was rolled up. From behind this mattress she drew forth a small wooden box, and thence she took a massive gold chain, a pair of splendid earrings, and three or four other articles of jewelry. These she examined with the greatest attention, holding them up to the light, and placing the gemmed ornaments in such a way as to catch the beams upon the brilliant stones with which they were set. Then she took some warm water in a little wooden bowl, and she began to wash the jewels in a way which convinced the Burker that she was seeking to rub some stains off them,

most probably spots of blood. Doubtless, then, those valuable articles were the produce of murder and robbery, and all that the Burker thus saw confirmed him in his opinion that the three cavaliers were what in other countries would be termed brigands, banditti, or highwaymen.

The Burker continued to watch the old woman for a few minutes longer, in the hope that she might display some more treasures, of which he had already made up his mind to possess himself if possible. The jewels, being cleansed, were restored to the little box, and thence the old woman drew forth a quantity of gold and silver coins, which she likewise began to examine with a scrutinizing attention. But now the Burker thought it high time to interfere, an he accordingly opened the door, thus bursting with startling abruptness into the cottage.

The old woman gave vent to a shriek at this sudden irruption, and dropping the coins from her hand, she stood in dismayed uncertainty as to the meaning of this startling presence. But the Burker did not give her many moments for reflection; he sprang upon her with as much fierceness as if he were a tiger fresh from some neighbouring jungle, and the frail, weak, emaciated form of the wretched woman was dashed against the wall. His fingers were at her throat; she could not again cry out. Nought but gasping, suffocating sounds emanated from her lips. These were like the gurglings of water endeavouring to force a passage through a pipe where it is pent up. The eyes of the Burker glared with ferocious resolution; he dashed the woman's head against the wall, and he quitted not his hold upon the throat until he acquired the certainty that she was a corpse.

Then he hastened to self-appropriate the jewels and the money which had tempted him to the commission of this horrible crime; he tore the mattress from its corner, he ransacked the whole place, but he found no other spoil worth carrying off. He looked about in the hope of finding some defensive and offensive weapons, with which he might arm himself, but he discovered none. He was thinking of taking his departure, but he could not resist the inclination to refresh himself with the remnants of the food which the hag had placed away in the cupboard. His respects were first of all paid to the bottle unto the contents of which he had seen the woman herself have recourse, and having partaken

of a deep draught of the potent spirit, he hastily crammed the provisions into his mouth.

But all of a sudden the rapid advance of horses' hoofs galloping toward the cottage smote his ears, and he darted forth. It was a beautiful starlit night, and his person was plainly visible to the three horsemen who were returning to the hut, for they were the same individuals who had so recently taken their departure thence, and whose speedy reappearance the Burker had so little anticipated. Ejaculations escaped their lips as they instantaneously suspected that there must be something wrong, for the murderer, in his precipitate retreat, had left the cottage door open. The three horsemen almost immediately overtook him, and with such speed did they thus rush in upon him that it was a perfect miracle he escaped from being trampled beneath the hoofs of the animals which they bestrode. They leaped from their horses, and seized upon him; he was immediately recognized by the bearded individual to whom he had so vainly addressed himself for food and lodging, and who had so unceremoniously banged the door in his face. This man and another held him in their custody, while the third rushed into the cottage. Then cries of rage and astonishment rather than of horror burst from the lips of this last-mentioned person on beholding the spectacle of the murdered woman, but in reference to that spectacle he was no doubt too much accustomed to deeds of blood to be horrified at it. The truth was quickly proclaimed to his two comrades, one of whom drew forth a pistol and was about to level it at the Burker's head, when his wrist was caught by the hand of the person with the beard, and who was evidently the chief of the desperadoes. This man hastily ejaculated a few words, of which the Burker comprehended just sufficient to make him aware that instead of being summarily put out of existence he was to be reserved for a few minutes until his captors could decide upon some punishment which in its horror might be more befitting the atrocity he had perpetrated. He was dragged into the cottage, and the three men were on the point of searching his person, when the Burker, with a desperate effort, disengaged himself from their grasp, and with such violence that one of the desperadoes was hurled against the wall, where his head struck some projecting object and he re-

mained senseless. A pistol bullet, discharged by the man with the grizzled beard, whistled past the Englishman's ear, but in the twinkling of an eye the latter, driven to desperation, sprang at the person just alluded to and hurled him down likewise. All this was the work of a moment, for the Burker seemed to be nerved with the strength of a thousand. The remaining desperado bounded toward him with his drawn dagger. With one grasp as dexterous as it was powerful, the Burker tore it from his hand, and drove it into his heart. The Hindu fell back with a loud cry; the Burker gained the door and rushed from the cottage.

Springing upon the nearest steed, he urged the animal into its fleetest gallop, but he quickly found that he was pursued, — he had no doubt by the chief of the three desperadoes. For some minutes he continued galloping along at a tremendous pace, until he could no longer conceal from himself the fact that fleet though his progress were, that of his pursuer was more rapid still, and his resolve was quickly taken. He threw himself from his steed, taking care to alight on the grass which grew thick by the side of the road, and though considerably bruised, he experienced no other injury. He crouched down in the dense shade of the trees, while the horse went careering on, and in a few moments his pursuer dashed past. Then the Burker plunged amidst the trees, gained the fields on the opposite side, and hurried across them as fast as his bruised limbs would permit.

He soon became convinced that he was safe from pursuit, and he relaxed his speed. We have already said that it was a beautiful starlit night, and the Burker could thus discern all the features of the landscape through which he was wending his way. There were plenty of trees, but he could distinguish no habitation. He walked on, and thus for a couple of hours he continued his route, until he reached a little village, where he looked about for the khan, if there were one. He was not long in discovering the house of public accommodation. The fire which charity usually provided in those places was not extinct, and by its light he could perceive an individual seated in the corner. That person recognized him, for in a moment he sprang at the Burker's throat and dashed him with violence to the ground. The Englishman was stunned by the force of the concussion,

and when he came back to consciousness he found himself alone. He felt in his pockets; the jewels and the coin which he had self-appropriated at the hut were gone, for the individual who had thus assailed him was the chief of the three desperadoes. Why the man had not taken his life the Burker could not conceive, unless it were that he either fancied that the violence of the fall had killed him, or else that he had very recently been seen in that khan by some of the inhabitants of the village, and having his own reasons for not choosing to debar himself of the opportunity of future visits, he had thought it more prudent to abstain from committing a crime of which he must inevitably be suspected as the author. Be this as it may, it is not the less certain that the Englishman had escaped with his life; but he mentally levelled the bitterest imprecations against the robber-chief who had despoiled him of the jewelry and the coins. The Burker did not reflect that this punishment was far less in amount than the retributive justice which was rightfully his due for the barbarous murder he had committed at the cottage.

Afraid that the desperado might possibly think better of having spared his life, or for any other reason might return, the Burker issued from the khan and resumed his wanderings. The sun, when rising above the eastern hills, found him still painfully dragging himself along, and not a habitation was to be seen. The heat soon became so intense that he was compelled to seek the shade of a group of trees, and he fell fast asleep. He slumbered for several hours, for the sun was considerably past the meridian when he awoke again, and his wanderings were resumed. Still he beheld no habitation, not so much as the humblest cottage where he could implore a meal, and he was famishing. He severely felt the bruises which he had sustained when throwing himself from the horse, and it was with difficulty that he pursued his way.

As the dusk advanced, the Burker fancied that he heard the ominous growl of some wild beast in the distance; he stopped short, the blood freezing in his veins, his hair seeming as if it stood on end. But all was silent, and he continued his way. He knew by this time that several kinds of wild beasts, especially tigers, haunt particular spots, and he therefore put forth all his speed to increase the distance

between himself and the place where he fancied the terrible sounds had reached his ear. The night set in with a degree of darkness such as he had not known before ever since these wanderings of his commenced, but still he pursued his way, with the continuous hope that the glimmering of a light would at length guide him to some habitation. He had now eaten nothing for twenty-four hours; he was faint with hunger, as well as exhausted with fatigue. Every now and then he fancied that the ominous growl reached him from a distance, and thus he dared not yield to that sense of weariness; he was compelled to pursue his way.

Through the darkness did he wander on; no beaten road was it that he was now pursuing, and as far as he could possibly judge, the country was growing wilder and wilder. All of a sudden the horrible idea flashed to his mind that he might be penetrating into some jungle, and he stopped short, all the flesh creeping upon his bones. Not long did he deliberate; he turned and endeavoured to retrace his way, but he soon found himself floundering through that long, rank grass and amidst that underwood which was so terribly characteristic of the jungle where the most horrible experiences of his Indian life had been obtained. Nothing could exceed the wild horror and anguish which took possession of the miserable man, but he succeeded in extricating himself from the thicket into which his wayward steps had led him, and he stood upon what he conceived to be safer ground. All further thought of endeavouring to retrace his way was now abandoned, and overcome with exhaustion, he sank down where he was. A species of desperate carelessness now succeeded the agonizing feelings to which he had previously been a prey, and he almost persuaded himself that it would be better if in the slumber to which he meant to yield some reptile should sting him to death or some wild beast should despatch him at a blow. And soon the man slept.

When he awoke the sun was just breaking in the eastern horizon, and the Burker, starting up, glanced hurriedly around. Yes, his worst fears were confirmed; it was but too true, he was evidently again in the midst of a jungle. Oh, if any one had seen him at that moment, how ghastly pale he grew! what horror convulsed his features! No longer could he call to his aid that desperate brutal callousness

with which he had nerved himself before closing his eyes in slumber during the past night. No, for he was now keenly alive to all the renewed terrors of his position. For awhile he abandoned himself to the agony of his feelings, and tears came from his eyes. It was not the first time that wretch whose soul was stained with a thousand misdeeds had wept in the midst of an Indian jungle. But at length he suddenly cursed himself for his weakness, and he looked with straining eyes around, in the hope of discovering where the wild scenery might gradually grow less savage or altogether cease. But he could discern no issue from the wilderness. He strove to find the marks of his footsteps, that by retracing them his aim should be accomplished. Herein again he failed, and as he stood there, in the midst of that jungle, he had no earthly conception from which point of the compass he had entered it. If he were to wander on in the hope of finding the means of egress, he might only be plunging deeper and deeper into a wilderness which his imagination, guided by past experience, depicted as full of horrors. Every source of apprehension belonging to that past experience, in connection with the frightful circumstances of an Indian jungle, was now again opened up to his fevered fancy. The wretch was famishing, and yet he forgot his hunger amidst the agitation of his thoughts.

Either to find an issue from that place or to perish in the attempt, these were now the alternatives which once again he had before him. He wandered on, avoiding as well as he was able the long grass, on account of the venomous reptiles, and the trees on account of the boa-constrictor. At length he beheld a shrub laden with fruits, such as he had seen in the markets of towns and villages, and in the gardens belonging to farmhouses. He therefore felt assured that they were not poisonous, even though growing in their wild state, but he knew not their name. He ate greedily of those fruits, and when he had thus appeased his hunger and thirst, he filled his wallet with them. Then he continued his way, and for two or three hours he wandered on in the scarcely tolerable heat of the scorching sun, not daring to seek the shade of the trees, and vainly looking about for some cavern wherein to shelter himself.

Slowly and painfully he progressed, finding no issue from that jungle, wondering whether he were plunging deeper

and deeper into it, and wondering likewise whether it were the same of which his former experiences were so hideous and so horrible. Perhaps, he thought to himself, his circuitous wanderings might possibly have brought him back into that same terrible maze, and he almost wished that it was so, for he fancied that if he could find his way to the cavern, he might thence remember the direction which had led him to an issue into a place of safety. Thus he wandered on and on, endeavouring to buoy himself up with hope, but nevertheless having the sickening conviction that it was feeble indeed. He grew more and more desponding; he found it to be in vain to struggle against the despair which was growing upon him, hemming him in closer and closer, narrowing the circle which for a little while he had managed to keep at a distance. He felt like a doomed man; a presentiment that his hour approached was creeping upon him, stealing into his soul, gnawing as it were into his heart's core, making the perspiration feel colder and more clammy upon his brow and all over his form, despite the torrid sunbeams that poured their full glare upon him as he dragged his weary limbs along. It was thus in this wretched frame of mind that the Burker pursued his way through the jungle, but the catastrophe was near at hand. He presently fancied that he discovered something like a beaten path, and for a few moments joy sprang up in his soul. But the seeming path was suddenly lost in the midst of tall, rank herbage, where stood a solitary tree. Though hitherto so careful to avoid the neighbourhood of trees, yet the Burker disregarded on this occasion his wonted caution, for he thought that the path might be only encumbered by the thickets of weeds and bushes, and that it might be continued on the other side. He was pursuing his way, when quick as the lightning-flash leaps forth from the storm-cloud, a tremendous snake sprang down from the tree, and more quickly than the eye can wink, the wretched man was enfolded in the awful prisonage of its coils.

Oh, what a wild cry of agony rang through the jungle! But here our description must stop short; we cannot enter deliberately into the painful details of that wretched criminal's sufferings, both mental and physical, which lasted for many hours, until the huge reptile with its constricting power crushed the breath out of its victim's body.

CHAPTER XXX

INDERABAD

Queen Indora and her royal husband were making a tour of their dominions at the time the magnificent procession passed like a gorgeous panorama before the view of the concealed English fugitive. It was Indora's object to introduce her consort to the principal cities and towns of the kingdom of Inderabad, and at the same time to receive the memorials and petitions of those of her subjects who had representations to make or grievances to complain of. She and her husband travelled with the accustomed pomp of Oriental potentates, — not that they themselves were flattered by this display of ostentation and ceremony, but because they considered it expedient to follow the course that was in accordance with the habits, manners, and prejudices of the country. At every town which they visited, the municipal authorities prepared the most welcome reception for the royal travellers, and this was no false nor hollow parade of sycophantic feelings, but it was the sincere enthusiasm of persons who were satisfied with their rulers. Those very municipal corporations themselves owed their existence to the enlightened policy which Indora's husband, when plain Clement Redcliffe, had recommended for the adoption of the King of Inderabad; and thus all those town councillors pressed forward with a genuine feeling of gratitude to welcome the personage to whose enlightened advice they were indebted for the civic privilege of self-government. Nor less were they enthusiastic in their welcome of that lady who had raised to her side upon the throne the man whose name had for years past been idolized in Inderabad, the enlightened English reformer to whose policy that kingdom owed the liberty of its institutions and the spirit

of strict justice which animated the execution of its laws.

The royal tour was a series of pageants, festivities, and rejoicings. From the palatial mansion to the humblest cottage the effect of the liberal policy which Indora's husband had in times past initiated was everywhere felt, and in the breasts of all grades beat hearts that were full of enthusiasm for their intelligent king and his grandly handsome wife. In every city and town a high court was held, at which all memorials and petitions were received, but few were the complaints brought under the cognizance of their Majesties. In these rare instances where it did occur, the minutest investigation took place, and chastisement was inflicted on the offending authorities. The manner in which justice was thus distributed enhanced the admiration already experienced by the people for their illustrious rulers, and the judges, magistrates, and other functionaries of the law were taught the lesson that as their good conduct was certain to be rewarded, any dereliction on their part was, on the other hand, equally sure to be detected and punished.

It was the determination of Queen Indora and her royal husband that Inderabad should be rendered the model state of Hindustan; that all its internal resources should be developed to the utmost, not for the mere benefit of a few, but for the advantage of the many. According to old prejudice, there were still some few offices which were hereditary in particular families, but this system was completely abolished, and all those situations were thrown open to the general competition of merit. Schools were established, and a good national system of education was founded. In short, every measure was taken to ensure the welfare, the prosperity, and the happiness of the millions over whom Queen Indora and her husband ruled so carefully and so well.

When the tour was completed, the royal procession returned to the capital. It was a grand day for Inderabad, — that one on which the whole population of the city poured forth to welcome the return of their king and queen. These illustrious personages were received with the loudest acclamations, and here again the enthusiasm was all genuine; it was not the false, hollow, motiveless, and unmerited

adulation which attends upon the progress of royalty in other countries of the world, especially in those of Europe.

And now let us look into the interior of the palace at Inderabad. There we shall behold the queen and her illustrious consort seated upon their thrones, in the great audience-hall, giving an affable and gracious reception to all the high dignitaries of the kingdom, to the councillors, the judges, and the magistrates, and receiving such recommendations or suggestions as each in his own special department might have to offer. And all those dignitaries appeared to be inspired with the same enlightened views and intentions which animated their sovereigns. If they saw opportunities of effecting improvements or legitimate economies in the departments over which they presided, they manifested the most enlightened zeal to take the initiative of their own accord, instead of waiting until public clamour demanded ameliorations or insisted upon the abolition of abuses. It was no mere meaningless levee which those sovereigns thus held; it had good business purposes in view, and Queen Indora, as well as her husband, felt, when the reception was concluded, that they had not sat upon thrones as idols to receive an adulation which should be offered to God alone, and which is impious when offered to mere mortals, but that the hours they devoted to the ceremony were fraught with real sterling benefit to their subjects.

The audience being finished, the king and queen retired awhile to their own private apartments, and thither we will follow the splendid Indora. We shall now find her seated in an elegantly furnished boudoir, attended by half a dozen of her ladies, with whom she conversed upon intellectual topics. The most serious sage might have been a listener without finding his common sense outraged or his soul disgusted by any frivolities on the part of that beauteous bevy. Presently the queen bethought herself of something, and she gave instructions to one of her ladies, who immediately retired to execute it. In about half an hour a young woman, in a European dress, was introduced into the boudoir, and she threw herself upon her knees at the feet of the queen.

"Rise, Amy," said her Majesty, and then she made a sign for all her ladies to retire. "Sit down by my side," continued Indora, "and tell me how fares it now with your

sister Marion? How has she borne herself during the three months of my absence on my tour through my kingdom?"

"Your Majesty may judge by my countenance," replied Amy Sutton, with a tone and look of the deepest gratitude, "whether I have reason to be rejoiced at the conduct of my sister Marion. I feel convinced that she is thoroughly reformed, that she is completely penitent for her past errors, and that no temptation could now possibly draw her aside from the path of virtue."

"This is indeed gladdening intelligence, Amy," said Indora. "And your sister is still pleased with the secluded residence which I allotted to you both?"

"Oh, call it not secluded," exclaimed Miss Sutton, in a tone of grateful enthusiasm, "when it possesses every charm to render it agreeable. How could Marion be otherwise than satisfied with such a sweet spot? A picturesque villa, situated in the midst of a delicious garden, abounding in all the choicest fruits and flowers of this Oriental clime — oh, how deep a debt of gratitude do we both owe to your Majesty and to your illustrious consort the king!"

"I am well rewarded for anything I have done for you both," replied Indora, "by finding that you are grateful, by seeing that you are happy, and by hearing that your sister is so completely reformed. I promised you, Amy, that whenever the day came that you could positively and truthfully assure me of this reformation on your sister's part, I would grant her an audience. Go and conduct her hither."

For a moment there seemed to be some little hesitation and confusion on Amy Sutton's part, and while the blushes were still upon her cheeks, she said, "May it please your Majesty, both myself and my sister have formed a few acquaintances, and amongst them — "

"I think," interrupted Indora, smiling, "that I can penetrate your meaning, and if so, I may save you the confusion of further avowals. It is natural enough, — that is, if my surmise be correct. You have formed acquaintances, and amongst them are doubtless two young men who have not beheld with indifference the good looks of Amy and Marion Sutton. Is it not so?"

"It is, your Majesty," replied the young woman, her cheeks still suffused with blushes.

"And who are these young men?" asked the queen, her countenance gradually becoming serious.

Amy Sutton replied to the question.

"A captain and a lieutenant in the Royal Guard," continued the queen, "and I happen to recollect them both. Yes, they are good-looking young men. But have you reflected, Amy — "

"Gracious queen," responded the young woman, "they know everything. Yesterday they simultaneously avowed their sentiments, and I frankly explained to them all the antecedents of my sister and myself. Nothing did I conceal, neither the outrage which had robbed me of my honour, nor the temptations to which Marion had succumbed."

"And what said these young men?" asked Indora.

"I told them, may it please your Majesty," continued Amy, "of all your great kindness toward us both, and of the opportunity which you had afforded my sister of reforming her conduct. I assured them that Marion was indeed deeply penitent. In a word, may it please your Majesty, they will espouse us if we have your gracious permission."

"And that permission will not be refused, Amy," rejoined the queen. "Some such idea as this I had certainly entertained; indeed, I was in hope that you would comfortably settle in my dominions. There must be forgiveness for the erring who are truly penitent, and thus Marion must be forgiven. Go to her, bring her hither, and let me see your contrite sister."

Amy Sutton departed, and in a short time she returned, accompanied by Marion. The latter, so full-blown a beauty in her own native clime, had lost somewhat of the rich luxuriance of her charms, but it seemed as if it were only the meretricious glow that had passed away, leaving her more serious-looking and with the air of one who was now more accustomed to commune with herself. She threw herself at the queen's feet, and pressed to her lips the royal hand which she moistened with her tears. The queen bade her rise; she spoke kindly and encouragingly to her, and she gave her excellent advice, without the formality of a severe lecture. It was rather as a friend than with the authority of a sovereign that Queen Indora thus spoke, and her words produced a powerful effect upon the young woman. At length the two sisters retired, with the assurance that

their welfare should ever be watched over by Queen Indora.

If we were to glance into another part of the royal palace, we should find a steady-looking but a contented and cheerful European, seated in a large, comfortable apartment, with a quantity of papers before him. At his right hand upon the table stands an iron cash-box, and the lid being open, its glittering contents of gold and silver are revealed. One after another the domestics of the royal household enter this apartment, to receive their monthly salaries, as well as to render an account of the respective offices which they fill. The Englishman speaks the native language with facility; he maintains the proper dignity of a superior official, but there is no undue pride about him, nothing that savours of arrogance in his manner. He is calm and businesslike, with a kind word for every one who merits his approbation. He evidently occupies a post of the highest trust and confidence; he holds no mean rank in the royal palace, for the Oriental costume which he wears is rich, and he is treated with the utmost respect by those who thus in their turn seek his presence. For this personage is none other than the faithful Mark, now intendant of the royal household in the palace of Inderabad.

Let us look into another apartment in that same palatial dwelling, and we shall find the king, also seated at his desk, and his Majesty is busied with a variety of official documents, as well as with other correspondence. It is his private cabinet to which we thus introduce our reader; it is splendidly furnished, and on one side there is an array of shelves covered with volumes belonging to the best literature of the European nations. Presently Queen Indora enters, and a smile immediately appears on the countenance of her husband as he rises to welcome her. She seats herself by his side, and she tells him all that has just taken place with the two English sisters.

"You have acted kindly and wisely, as you always do, my beloved Indora," answered the king, gazing with mingled affection and admiration upon the gloriously handsome countenance of his splendid queen. "I know those officers; they are steady, well-conducted young men, and you will perceive, my Indora," continued his Majesty, taking up a paper from a pile upon his desk, "that according to the

recommendation of their colonel, I had placed their names upon this list for speedy promotion. I will see them to-morrow, and they shall assuredly wed these young women of their choice."

The queen was gratified to find that the project experienced her husband's approval, and the king proceeded to say, "The courier has just arrived with the European letters, and here are a number from our friends in the West. Look, Indora, these are for you; I recognize the writing of my sweet young relative Christina. And here are two or three from Christian to myself. Let us read, and then compare notes."

For some little time the royal couple were occupied with their correspondence, and when they had concluded, they again looked at each other.

"Christian tells me," said the king, "that he has every reason to believe that my young friend Stanley — whose father, by the bye, has been created a peer — is making an impression upon the heart of Christina."

"Oh, then, I see that you are not more than half in the secret, Bertram," replied Indora, with a gay and cheerful smile, "for the amiable Christina has written me several long letters, in which she frankly explains her feelings toward Major Stanley — and, in short, she loves him."

"Ah, is it so?" ejaculated the king. "Then I am indeed truly delighted."

"I always felt convinced," said Queen Indora, "that so well-principled, pure-minded, and excellent a girl as Christina would triumph successfully over the hallucination which for a time had taken possession of her in respect to Lord Octavian."

"Ah, there is a postscript to the latest of Christian's letters," exclaimed the king. "I had overlooked it. Yes, it is indeed true; the Honourable Major Stanley has been accepted by Christina."

At this moment the door of the royal cabinet opened, and an official made his appearance.

"Tidings, may it please your Majesties, have just reached Inderabad," said the official, — "hideous and horrible tidings they are, too, relative to that Englishman who escaped some time ago from one of the state prisons."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the king, "has a criminal's righteous doom in some way overtaken that wretch at last?"

"A doom, sire, the most fearful, the most terrible," replied the official. "It appears that three or four wandering gossoons were passing through a jungle in the neighbouring state. They were on their way to a cavern, to which, as I understand, they occasionally retire when pretending to withdraw themselves from the world for purposes of self-mortification, and while traversing that jungle, they beheld a frightful spectacle. The Englishman, still alive, was enfolded in the coils of a monstrous reptile. One of the gossoons happened to know something of him, I believe; he had seen him before, in the very cavern to which I am alluding."

"And you say that the wretch still lived?" asked the king, while horror was depicted on his own countenance as well as on that of the queen.

"Yes, sire, he still lived," rejoined the official. "I have just had the tale from the lips of the gossoons themselves, and, by the description of the man, it is unquestionably the same who escaped from Inderabad. On beholding those gossoons, he implored them in the most piteous manner to help him. But what could they do? They had no fire-arms, and even while the wretch was shrieking forth in his agony, the coils of the horrible reptile were constricting all the more tightly around him."

"Frightful though the man's death must have been," said the king, shuddering visibly, "it is not cruel nor uncharitable to declare that it was only an adequate retribution for the appalling crimes of which, to our certain knowledge, he has been guilty."

The official withdrew, and the king, following up the spirit of his former observations, said to the queen, "So true it is, my beloved Indora, that there is punishment in this world for the wicked, and that sooner or later God's vengeance will alight upon their heads."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE EXECUTION

Horsemonger Lane Gaol is the county prison for Surrey, and therefore persons committing penal offences on the southern side of the Thames are committed to that sinister establishment instead of to Newgate.

In a condemned cell at that Surrey prison we shall find Barbara Smedley. She had been convicted at the Central Criminal Court, on the clearest evidence, of having been an accomplice in the murder of Joseph Preston at the little house which she and her husband, together with her mother, Mrs. Webber, occupied at the time in Lambeth. The wretched woman knew that there was no earthly hope for her, and yet she seemed most impenitent. When she stood in the dock and was asked the usual question why sentence of death should not be pronounced, she had insolently pleaded that inasmuch as her husband, who was a participator in the same crime, had only been condemned to transportation for life, it would be "a burning shame" to send her to the scaffold. The judge considerately remonstrated with her, representing that her husband had availed himself of a special offer made by the government, and by giving the great criminal Barnes into custody, he had obtained that mercy which was promised in the placard issued by the secretary of state. Still Mrs. Smedley reasoned, with a bold hardihood, against the judge's argument, vowing that as long as her husband was suffered to live, it would be nothing short of downright murder to inflict the extreme penalty upon herself. Sentence was however pronounced, and when the awful judgment of the law was delivered, Bab Smedley was borne shrieking, yelling, and vociferating horribly, from the dock.

She was now in Horsemonger Lane Gaol, in a chamber formed of massive masonry, and with huge iron bars at the window. This window looked upon a passage that was well watched, and thus, even if she removed the bars, escape would be next to impossible. Remove those bars indeed! Many a strong, vigorous man had been in that same cell, under a similar sentence, and there had been no escape. Could she, a comparatively weak, feeble woman, do that which the powerful arms of stalwart men could not accomplish? No, no, she knew that she could not; she had neither saw nor file, she had not so much as a nail wherewith to work.

The door was massive, the walls were of a thickness that defied penetration. She was as if entombed in a sepulchre. And yet the threshold of the grave had not yet been passed by her; she was still living, — living to endure a terrible death. Did remorse strike her? No, she experienced not compunction for the crimes of which she had been guilty, but she gnashed her teeth with rage, and her eyes glared, and her form quivered with fury, and she clenched her fists until the nails almost penetrated into the flesh, at the idea that the world, as she termed it, had got the better of her and that the law had mastered her.

The chaplain visited her, and endeavoured to reason her into a better frame of mind, but she listened sullenly and gloomily. She did not choose to display her fiercer passions in the presence of the reverend gentleman, for fear lest he should report her as insubordinate, and she might be subjected to even a sterner coercion than that which she experienced. But when the chaplain had quitted her cell, she laughed scornfully; it was like the mocking laugh of a fiend. The truths of religion had not touched her; death had no terrors for her in respect to the world which lies beyond the grave. It was only on account of the fact of being cut short in the midst of her earthly career, that she felt so deeply, and this depth of her feeling was as far removed from true contrition as the poles are asunder. It was, as the reader has seen, the malicious fury of a fiend, the concentrated rage of a demoness, in having been triumphed over by the world and the law.

She was allowed to take a little exercise, either in a courtyard at stated hours, or in the passage communicating with

her own cell. She preferred the latter. She did not want, she said, to be made a spectacle to the other prisoners; it was enough to have to look forward to the day when she would become a spectacle for thousands in all the neighbourhood of the gaol.

There were several other cells in the same array with her own, opening into the same passage. These cells were allotted to female prisoners who had committed very serious offences. A couple of days after Bab Smedley's condemnation, and while she was walking to and fro in the passage, the iron gate at the end was opened to give admission to some new prisoner. This was an elderly woman, who was so overcome by grief and was weeping so bitterly that she had to be sustained by the turnkey who was conducting her in.

"Another candidate for up aloft?" asked Bab Smedley, thus alluding to the scaffold, for at Horsemonger Lane Gaol public executions take place on the roof of the main building.

"Not quite so bad as that," answered the turnkey, disgusted with the flippant hardihood of the condemned woman, and yet not choosing to speak harshly to her from the fact that she was condemned.

"Well, what is it, then?" demanded Bab, and without waiting for a reply, she said to the new prisoner, "Come, my good dame, it's no use whimpering here. All the tears in the world won't melt down these walls or soften the iron bars."

"Oh, my heavens! to think that it should have happened at last!" moaned the new prisoner, with bitterest lamentations, as she wrung her hands in despair, and Bab Smedley now discovered that she was a foreign woman from the peculiarity of her accent. "That villain Shadbolt —"

"Ah! he is safe under lock and key likewise, if that's any consolation to you," said the gaol official.

"I know it," exclaimed Madame Angelique, for she the new prisoner was, "and it is the only consolation. To think that I should have been so mad!" and she again gave way to her lamentations.

She was now consigned to a cell, and the turnkey locked her in, because the prison rules would not permit the condemned captive Barbara Smedley to hold conversation with any other inmate.

"Who is she, and what has she done?" asked Bab Smedley of the turnkey.

"She was once a famous milliner, and something else too, at the West End of the town," replied the turnkey. "She retired, as everybody thought, on a good fortune, and had a beautiful villa at Brixton. But a little while ago she seemed suddenly to lose the best part of all she had, — that is to say if she ever had it, — and she took up with a fellow named Shadbolt, who was once in the detective force. A precious scamp he is, though I daresay that this Frenchwoman knew a trick or two, and didn't require much temptation to lead her to do what she has done."

"And what is that?" asked Bab Smedley.

"Just a little bit of forgery," responded the turnkey. "Of course having been in such a good way of business, the Frenchwoman was pretty well acquainted with the signatures of many noblemen and rich gentlemen who used to pay their wives' bills by means of cheques, and perhaps she might have had some of their letters by her. However, let that be as it may, she and this Shadbolt tried to make up a good purse before bolting off together to France or America, or Heaven knows where. So they manufactured three or four cheques; they got the money for a couple, they were found out when presenting the third, and now they've been committed for trial."

"And that will be transportation for life," observed Bab Smedley.

"Just so," replied the turnkey, as he unlocked the gate at the end of the passage to let himself out.

"Well, for my part," rejoined Bab, "I'd sooner cut one caper and have done with it offhand."

The turnkey flung a look of pity upon the hardened woman, but he perceived that her attempt to smile was a hideously sickly one, and he knew therefore that though she pretended she would rather suffer death than be doomed to transportation for life, yet that in her own heart she envied the comparatively happy position of Madame Angelique. We may here remind the reader that the Frenchwoman had lost the greater portion of the ill-gotten gains of her former mode of life by having been compelled to assign them to charitable institutions according to the decree which Queen Indora had pronounced from the judgment

seat in the memorable tribunal at Oaklands. In a fit of desperation Madame Angelique had subsequently thrown herself entirely into the hands of the unprincipled scoundrel Shadbolt, and the reader has now seen the result of this fatal intimacy. The idea which had so often haunted her, namely, that of finding herself in a criminal prison, was now realized, and she knew that her doom would be transportation. Much altered was she during the last few months. She had lost her *embonpoint*, she had grown comparatively thin; her looks were haggard, her cheeks all the more so through the absence of the rouge that was wont to colour them; her eyes were sunken and hollow, some of her false teeth were gone. As for the state of her mind, it was more horrible than we can possibly describe, for she had but a very vague idea of what transportation actually meant, and through this very ignorance she was all the more terrified as in imagination she realized it. She pictured to herself gangs of felons, female as well as male, working together in chains, in the midst of swamps swarming with reptiles, or of forests rendered hideous by the howling of wild beasts; she shuddered at the fearful long voyage across the seas. In short, the ex-milliner of a fashionable region of the West End was now as abject and miserable a wretch as any unfortunate vagrant whom she had ever turned away from her door.

When locked up in the gloomy cell, — that cell which even in the middle of summer seemed to strike a cold horror deep down to her very vitals, — she threw herself on the hard pallet and gave way to her grief. She did not hear that there was a loud knock at the little trap in the huge, massive door, and that knock was repeated several times before it aroused Madame Angelique from the woeful condition into which she was plunged. At length she heard it, and starting up, she hastened to open the little trap. The woman whom she had seen in the passage now met her view.

" Come," she said, " what's the use of your taking on like this? It won't mend matters, I suppose, and why can't you and I have a little companionable discourse, — as I daresay we sha'n't be very long allowed to be neighbours together? "

" Who are you, and what have you done? " inquired

Madame Angelique. "But tell me," she added, with a shudder, "where is that woman who was condemned to death two days ago? I hope in the name of Heaven she is not near us! I should dream of nothing but gibbets and scaffolds — "

"Don't be a fool!" interjected Bab Smedley, who could not prevent her countenance from assuming a ghastly look. "Should you like to see the woman?"

"No — yes," replied Madame Angelique. "Yes, yes, I should like to see one who must be more miserable than myself, for there would be a consolation even in that."

"Don't make so sure," rejoined Bab Smedley, "that the woman you speak of is so uncommonly miserable."

"Not miserable!" cried Madame Angelique. "Good heavens — "

"Hush! — not so loud. We shall be overheard by those scamps of turnkeys, and they will pretty soon make us hold our tongues."

"You, at all events, seem to take your lot carelessly enough," said Madame Angelique, now speaking in a low voice again; and it was with a species of envy that she contemplated this woman who to outward appearance was so indifferent to the fact of being the inmate of a gaol. "I suppose you are not going to remain here long?"

"No, not long," replied Barbara Smedley; but it now struck Madame Angelique that she had a strange look. "My time's up next Monday week."

"So soon?" ejaculated the ex-milliner, and she heaved a deep sigh of envy.

"Yes, so soon," rejoined Mrs. Smedley.

Madame Angelique's attention was now more than ever riveted upon the woman's countenance, over which there appeared to sweep a look of such wild, intense horror that it seemed to indicate anything but a real callousness or indifference. A strange suspicion began to hover in the mind of the ex-milliner, for she recollected that the recently condemned murderess was to be executed on Monday week, and the coincidence of this woman's statement relative to the period of her own liberation, together with that look which had just swept over her features, engendered the idea that she herself might possibly be the doomed wretch.

"You wanted to see the woman who is to be hanged,"

said Barbara, affecting a laugh, but it was hollow, and died into a sepulchral gurgle in her throat, " and here she is."

" You? " ejaculated Madame Angelique, for even now she could scarcely believe her ears.

" Yes, I," responded Bab Smedley, exerting every effort to maintain an air of bravado. " And why not? I suppose I have had my day, and I may as well go next Monday week as live on. The turnkey told me you were safe to be transported, and I consider myself a happier woman than you. Why, sooner than I would be sent out of the country in a dreadful convict-ship, to endure all sorts of horrors, I would mount the scaffold cheerfully."

" No," said Madame Angelique, " you are deceiving me, you have not the slightest advantage over me. I am happier than you. You know it, you feel it. It is a useless endeavour on your part to persuade yourself — "

" Don't tell me that, don't dare speak to me in such a way," cried Barbara Smedley, " or I will tear your eyes out! " and her features became livid, not entirely with rage, but with the intense horror of her thoughts as she keenly felt the truth of all that the Frenchwoman had been just saying to her.

Madame Angelique was frightened at Barbara Smedley's appearance; she looked as if she were a tiger-cat about to fly at her, and the ex-milliner closed the little trap in the massive door.

Shortly afterward the turnkey came to lock Bab Smedley up in her cell again, and the miserable woman felt a despondency was creeping over her, — a despondency which she could not possibly shake off, a depression which defied all her efforts to struggle against. She endeavoured to sing, to hum a tune, to force her lips to repeat aloud the declaration that she would sooner be executed on the scaffold than condemned to transportation, but all was of no avail. Misery of mind was growing upon her apace, till at length she sat down upon the pallet in her cell and gave way to her reflections.

But it was when night came, and she was in the utter darkness of this cell, that her thoughts grew the most harrowing. There she was, in the full vigour of life, in a few days to become a corpse. She would be placed in a coffin, and the horrible idea stole into her brain that when in that

coffin she would have the suffocating sense of knowing that she was there. She could not fancy that this life, which was now so vigorous, could so utterly pass away as to leave her inanimate as a marble statue, unsusceptible of whatsoever she was now enabled to feel, to know, or to think of. With such thoughts as these she writhed and tossed upon her bed; she pressed her hands to her brows to subdue the terrible activity of her brain, and then she strove to settle herself to sleep, but hours passed ere slumber stole upon her eyes.

Ah, what was this? Why was the door opening, and who was now stealing in? Was it indeed the turnkey's voice that bade her speak low as he bent over her couch, and told her that he had come to save her? Could she possibly believe him? Oh, if there were a light, that she might distinguish his countenance in order to discern whether he were mocking her or not! He bids her rise and hastily huddle on her clothes, but to be sure and not make the slightest noise, for fear lest an alarm should be raised and the proceedings should be discovered. Oh, how eager for freedom is she now! But in the strong suspense, the wild hope, and the tremendous fear which she experiences, she trembles so that she can scarcely put on her apparel. At length it is done, and she follows the turnkey from the cell. She is in the passage; even the air of that stone corridor, though 'tis still within the prison walls, seems to inspire her lungs with the vivifying freshness of freedom's atmosphere. The turnkey unlocks the iron gate. Why is he thus befriending her? Why is he risking everything on his own account to save her from the gallows? She knows not, and her thoughts grow confused as she tries to conjecture. But at all events he is sincere, and that is sufficient; for he is performing his promise, he is guiding her to freedom. They thread the stone passages; they walk on tiptoe, their garments rustle not, they proceed with the stealthiness of ghosts. Her kind friend, whose generosity is so unaccountable, possesses the key of every door that stands betwixt herself and freedom, and each is opened in its turn. How favourable are all circumstances! No other official of the gaol appears, no one comes forward to offer the slightest molestation nor to bar their way, and thus the courtyard is reached. It is traversed — ah, now they are at the great gates of the build-

ing! But what will the friendly turnkey do? How can he contrive to open them? But strange, the porter does not come forth, and her generous guide has got the keys of these gates likewise. The wicket opens, she passes out, she turns to thank him, but he is gone. And now she forgets precisely what turning she takes to get away from the dreadful prison she has just left, but she finds herself groping along through lanes and alleys which get narrower and darker and less practicable the further she proceeds. It is as if she were in a maze which becomes more and more bewildering the deeper she plunges into it. She is frightened; her liberty seems to be of no use to her. She has an appalling sense of progressing nearer and nearer to some terrific danger which will suddenly overwhelm her. And yet she must continue to flounder on through the intense darkness, for to turn back is to retrace her way to the prison whence she has escaped. All of a sudden a hand is laid upon her shoulder, myriads of lights spring up around her, the narrow alley through which she was groping her way swarms with constables, her name is vociferated — and she wakes,to find it all a dream!

Heaven alone could tell how long this dream had lasted, but whether it had endured for a space equivalent to that which the incidents themselves seemed to occupy, or whether all its elaborated details had actually been condensed into a far more limited compass in respect to time, certain it is that the woman had been dragged through all the variations of the strong feelings, emotions, and sensations that could have veritably pertained to the progress of realities. So exhausting was the influence of all she had thus felt, and so overpowering was the crowning disappointment, that she lay for some time as if unable to move. The light of morning was glimmering in at the barred window, and the configuration of the vaulted cell, as well as the few objects that were in it, were discernible with sufficient clearness to convince her that she was really the inmate of a dungeon, and that it was no horrible hallucination which her fevered brain had conjured up. Yes, she was a condemned woman, and she was to perish on the gibbet!

Day after day now passed, and she saw no more of Madame Angelique, for the Frenchwoman was afraid of her, and would not open the trap-door when she knew that Barbara Smedley was taking exercise in the passage. The chaplain

continued to visit her, but she still showed no contrition. She was very, very miserable, but not penitent. Her hardihood was breaking, but not in the right sense. It was leaving her a prey to horror, to anguish, to the direst alarms, we might even say to an excruciation of mental agonies, but still it awakened not in her a true sense of the awful position in which she was placed.

Her time was drawing on, day after day was going by; one more day was past. The fatal one, as it approached, was assuming a hideous substantiality, like a spectral form emerging from a mist and taking colossal proportions. Still there was no penitence. Of wretchedness and woe, of deepest depression and profoundest despondency, of all these was she the prey, but she had no true remorse. The Sunday came on which what is called " the condemned sermon " was to be preached, and the chaplain delivered a discourse which he hoped might touch her heart. She rocked herself to and fro in the condemned pew, and when the ceremony was over, she was so weak and faint that she had to lean on the arm of a turnkey to get back to her cell. Then the chaplain visited her, but he found her still impenetrable to the feelings with which he piously sought to imbue her. She had now a matron or nurse remaining altogether with her, for an apprehension was entertained that in her desponding condition she might attempt suicide. Oh, what a glorious illustration of the merciful nature of our law, which takes such zealous care of those whom it is about to hang!

The hours went by, and though she did nothing to beguile the time, opened no book, conversed not with the matron, nor on this day took exercise in the passage, yet did the minutes flit past as if on the wings of a hurricane, for the nearer her doom approached, the more quickly went the time. Just when she would have had it drag itself along as if with leaden feet, it flew past her with the speed of a race-horse.

It was not until a late hour that she put off her apparel and lay down on her pallet. She had sat up and kept awake as long as she could, in order that she should not be cheated by slumber of the time that yet remained for her to live. So exhausted was she by the harrowing emotions that raged within her, that sleep almost immediately visited her eyes,

and thus she slept for some hours, — a dreamless sleep so far as she understood it, but yet a feverish one, as the vigilant matron perceived that it was.

But, ah, what ominous sounds are those which now break upon the ears of the condemned woman? A candle is burning dimly in the cell, and she starts up in affright. She listens; there is a hammering, a knocking, carpenters are at work. She comprehends what it is; the scaffold is being erected on the roof of the gaol! Each blow of the hammer seems to strike upon her very brain; every fresh sound appears to touch a chord thrilling with horrible coldness to her very heart's core. The matron endeavours to direct her attention to the more serious duty of preparing to receive the chaplain, for it is now past five o'clock in the morning, and the reverend gentleman is expected. But the condemned woman hears her not; all her thoughts seem to be riveted in an appalled manner upon those sounds that reverberate so dull, so heavy, and with such ominous reiteration through the cell.

The chaplain made his appearance, but on finding that the prisoner was still in bed, he retired for a short time while she rose and apparelled herself. This she did mechanically, at the suggestion of the matron, and then the chaplain returned. She listened to him with eyes expressive of a dreamy vacancy; she appeared not to comprehend what he was saying, but only to be conscious of the droning sound of a human voice in her ears. Thus nearly two hours passed, and then the matron, who had retired for a time, brought in the condemned woman's breakfast. She ate and drank all that was set before her, but everything she now did seemed to be marked by the listless apathy of an idiot.

At length an incident occurred which startled her into a vividly frightful sense of her appalling position. The door opened; the governor and the under-sheriff entered the cell, but there was some one behind them, a man who lingered on the threshold. This was the executioner. Bab Smedley started up to her feet, her countenance convulsed with horror, and then she suddenly abandoned herself to the wildest and most passionate lamentations. When her anguish had somewhat subsided, and she had resumed her seat, the chaplain thought it a fitting opportunity to renew his

well-meant ministrations, but the wretched woman listened not to him; she sat rocking herself to and fro, moaning piteously. The executioner approached; she rushed to a corner of the cell, she wildly bade him keep off, if he valued his life. Remonstrances were vain, and force had to be used in order to keep her still, while the executioner pinioned her arms in the usual manner.

Then she felt herself to be utterly powerless, and death already seemed staring her in the face. A sudden revulsion of feeling took place within her, and she implored the chaplain to speak words of consolation. He did his duty, according to the manner in which he understood it, by assuring her that there was a possibility of pardon for one who expressed and felt contrition even on the very verge of the grave, and the miserable woman now clutched eagerly at the promise. The procession was formed; it issued from the cell, and the ascent to the roof of the prison was commenced.

The top of the gaol was reached, and then, as the condemned woman flung her looks around, what a living ocean was spread before her eyes! What countless multitudes were gathered about the place, and all to see a fellow creature die! She was closely attended by the chaplain, and until the instant when that mass of upturned human faces met her view, she had appeared to be listening to the words which were flowing from his lips. But now she suddenly stopped short, she gasped for breath; she would have fallen had not the governor and the under-sheriff been ready to sustain her. Until her appearance upon the roof of the gaol, there had been conversation amidst the crowd, — laughing, jesting, practical joking, and all those indecencies of behaviour which are characteristic of such a scene in England. But when that doomed woman emerged upon the summit of the gaol, a dead silence fell upon the multitude; it seemed as if the myriads of Babel itself had been suddenly stricken dumb. The voice of the chaplain was clearly audible to a considerable distance, and the prison bell was tolling the knell of her who was about to die.

Yes, the burial service was being said, and the knell was being tolled, for one who was yet alive, — one who, if pardon were at that instant accorded, might yet live on for many a long, long year; for one who had no mortal sickness that had brought her to the verge of the grave, but who

physically was hale, hearty, and strong, with all life's principles potent and unimpaired within her, and who in respect to age was only in her prime. Yet was she already treated as one who belonged no more to this world, one who was already dead, an animated corpse, proceeding by some strange mechanism toward the gibbet, where for one whole hour by the clock she was to be ignominiously suspended. And thus for her the service for the dead was being recited, the solemn knell was being tolled.

And amidst that multitude of myriads congregated in the neighbourhood of the gaol, pressing hard up against the barricades, densely packed in every street, court, and alley whence a glimpse could be obtained of death's hideous paraphernalia, covering the housetops, even mounted upon the very chimneys themselves, — amidst this mighty assemblage, we say, there were beings of her own sex, females who had come to witness her execution, just in the same way that they would flock to a pageant or a fair, to witness the sovereign open Parliament, to feast their eyes upon the lord mayor's show, or to treat themselves with a trip to Greenwich on Whit-Monday. Oh, and what was more hideous still, many of those women had children in their arms. Frightful inoculation from the foulness of the gallows for that youthful offspring, terrible infection for the juvenile progeny, from that enormous and loathsome plague-spot upon the civilization of this country!

The wretched woman ascended the few steps leading to the platform of the gibbet, the chaplain on one side, the under-sheriff on the other, the executioner immediately behind, the governor and some other officials of the prison a little way in the rear. O Heaven! what a haggard, ghastly look, how full of deep, ineffable horror that glance which the doomed woman threw upward to the black, ominous cross-beam and the chain with the hook that was dangling there to receive the noose of the halter which was already tied around her neck! She could no longer sustain herself by her own voluntary power; she was supported by those who attended on her last moments. The executioner, one of the expertest professors of the diabolical art of strangulation as applied to his fellow creatures, a man who had most successfully graduated in this science, and whose experiences were associated with the tragic ends of all the

great criminals who for the past dozen or twenty years had suffered death by the law's vengeance in this country, — the executioner, we say, was not long at his fearful work. He placed the woman on the very centre of the drop; in a moment the halter was attached to the chain; in the twinkling of an eye the knot was so accurately turned under the left ear that it should press upon a vital part; and then the sinister form of the executioner disappeared as suddenly as if he had melted into thin air. He had this faculty of gliding ghostlike away from the platform the very moment his horrible preliminaries were accomplished, but it was only to penetrate beneath that platform, to do all the rest.

The finger of the executioner drew back the bolt which sustained the drop; it fell, and the doomed woman, after struggling fearfully for a few minutes, ceased to exist. For one hour, by the clock, as appointed by the sheriffs, did the body hang; for that whole hour did the gathered multitudes remain to gaze upon it, and then once more did the executioner make his appearance upon the platform. This time it was to cut down the corpse, and lower it into the coffin which had been placed beneath the drop to receive it. Then workmen speedily came to remove the gibbet; the crowd melted away, the pickpockets glided off with their booty, and for the remainder of that fatal Monday all the public-houses in the neighbourhood did an excellent business. Doubtless some of the publicans thought of the old adage, " that it is an ill wind which blows nobody any good," and perhaps, if the truth were known, many of them would not have been very much displeased to have a hanging in the neighbourhood every Monday morning.

CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

Before laying down the pen in respect to the present narrative, it only remains for us to record a few last particulars concerning some of the most prominent characters who have figured upon the stage of our story.

The young Duke of Marchmont led the lovely Isabella Vincent to the altar, and a happy day was it which united this youthful pair whose attachment had been marked by so much constancy and devotion. There has been but a lapse of few years since the solemnization of this bridal, but judging from the felicity which the Duke and Duchess of Marchmont have hitherto experienced in their married state, it is only just and reasonable to argue that this same sunshine of bliss will endure until the end. There is so much congeniality in their dispositions, each possesses a heart so susceptible of the warmest and sincerest affections, both are so imbued with virtuous principles and with the purest thoughts, that it were impossible for their union to be otherwise than a happy one.

Lady Christina Vivian did not mistake the nature of her own feelings, nor miscalculate the strength of her mind, when she assured her brother at Oaklands that she had completely triumphed over the hallucination which for a time had possessed her in respect to Lord Octavian Meredith. She accepted the suit of the high-minded, the handsome, and the well-principled Robert Stanley, and in due time she accompanied him to the altar. By the recent death of his father, he has inherited the peerage of Vandeleur, and thus all that rank, riches, and the heart's affection can possibly combine together in order to achieve the happiness of mortals belongs to the lot of Lord and Lady Christina Vandeleur.

It is with equal pleasure that we have to report favourably of the matrimonial career of Lord and Lady Octavian Meredith since they were reunited in France. Octavian himself recovered, as Christina had done, from a hallucination which threatened to mar all his happiness, and if he thinks of the past, it is only that he may make all the more complete atonement to the amiable Zoe for the present and for the future. And, oh, is not Zoe herself happy? Yes, and all the more so because this glorious sunlight of bliss was for a period so little foreseen, — at that period, we mean, when self-exiled from her home, she dwelt in the old chateau in the south of France. Lord and Lady Octavian Meredith returned to England shortly after the marriage of Christina, and what a happy day was that on which the two amiable friends were again locked in each other's arms. No syllable relative to the past was spoken, and yet there were looks exchanged which conveyed assurances of mutual happiness as well as pledges of imperishable amity.

An affectionate correspondence is maintained between Christian and Christina in England, and the King and Queen of Inderabad in that far-off Oriental clime, and the vessels which plough the seas between the British ports and Calcutta frequently bear choice gifts from one side to the other, — those reciprocal testimonials of a permanent and affectionate friendship. And while in England they hear of how the kingdom of Inderabad has indeed become the model state of Hindustan, the rulers of that kingdom, on the other hand, read from time to time, with ineffable delight, in the London newspapers which are forwarded to them, of how the Duke of Marchmont and Lord Vandeleur, Christina's husband, are distinguishing themselves in the British senate, and how their voices are invariably raised in favour of liberty, justice, and human rights.

Sir Edgar and Lady Beverley are as happy in their marriage state as those fond couples of which we have been speaking, and the sincerest friendship subsists between them, the Marchmonts, the Vandeleurs, and the Merediths. The happiness of Sir Edgar and Lady Beverley experienced, however, a passing shade, thrown by the tragic fate of Mrs. Oxenden, for steeped in iniquities though she were, Laura could not forget that she was her sister.

The reader will not have forgotten the solemn lesson

delivered to Mrs. Oxenden by Queen Indora on the occasion of that memorable scene at Oaklands, when her Majesty sat upon the dread triubunal. But, as we intimated at the time, Indora's words, impressive though they were, could produce no effect upon a heart so hardened as that of Mrs. Oxenden. When liberated from Oaklands, this selfish, worldly-minded, unprincipled woman hastened back to London, and endeavoured to find her late paramour, Alexis Oliver. But she soon discovered that the intimation she had received from the queen at Oaklands was substantially correct, and that this young man, having felt the degradation of the position in which he was living upon the gold of an abandoned female, had sought, under the auspices of his forgiving family's countenance and interest, the means for carving out an honourable career for himself. Mrs. Oxenden subsequently succeeded in captivating a foreign ambassador, who placed her in a sumptuous mansion and surrounded her with all luxuries. Her extravagances knew no bounds, but her infatuated protector, being immensely rich, ministered to them without a murmur. Whose equipage was more splendid than that of Mrs. Oxenden? What lady equestrian displayed more beautiful steeds in the places of public resort than the mistress of the foreign ambassador? But one day there was alarm and consternation in Hyde Park, — pedestrians running along frantically, with the expectation of beholding some frightful tragedy, equipages moving as quickly as possible out of the way of a steed which was galloping like the whirlwind, and over which the lady rider appeared to have lost all control. For awhile, however, she retained her seat in a manner which proved that though the animal itself was no longer under her restraint, her self-possession was not lost. Thus for upwards of ten minutes was she borne along with the speed of the hurricane, until a gate was reached. The animal rushed through it, and by the abruptness of the turn which it thus made, Mrs. Oxenden was thrown off. With terrific violence was she dashed against the masonry of that gate, and those who sped to raise her up believed that she was dead. But no, the spark of life was not extinct, and she was borne to her splendid mansion, there to linger on the verge of the grave for a period of many weeks. At length she recovered. Yes, her health was restored, but her beauty

was gone. Monstrous ugliness had stamped the countenance which so lately had the power to dazzle, to fascinate, and beguile. Her teeth had been knocked out, her nose was beaten flat, an eye was lost, her forehead and one of her cheeks were horribly scarred. Where was the foreign ambassador? He had abandoned her. She was surrounded by wealth, and she might still live comfortably, in a pecuniary sense, for the remainder of her existence, but with the loss of her beauty the world's attractions were lost likewise. The terrific disfigurement produced by the accident filled her with loathing for life. One morning, when her maid entered the chamber, Mrs. Oxenden was found hanging to the bedpost.

The Honourable Wilson Stanhope profited to some little extent by his former painful experiences in the ways of iniquity. The spectacle at Oaklands, and the counsel addressed to him by Queen Indora on that memorable occasion, were not altogether lost upon him. He wrote penitent letters to some influential connections whom he possessed, and through their medium he obtained a clerkship in one of the government departments. He abstained from actual crime; he shuddered at the idea of ever again placing himself within reach of the criminal laws, but he could not restrain his habits of extravagance. Debts accumulated, until at length he was arrested and conveyed to the Queen's Bench. Thence he procured his liberation by passing through the Insolvents' Court, — a process for which he forfeited his clerkship. His friends as a last resource procured for him a commission in the Anglo-Turkish Contingent, when that body was raised shortly after the breaking out of the war, and it is to be hoped that the Honourable Wilson Stanhope may in his new position profit more completely than he had previously done by the experiences of his earlier years.

It was gratifying to the King of Inderabad to learn, in the course of time, that his goodness and generosity toward Eveleen O'Brien and Lettice Rodney had not been thrown away. Both of these young women became completely penitent for the past. The former, restored to her family in Ireland, married a young tradesman in good circumstances, but whom she did not deceive in respect to her antecedents. Lettice Rodney, after having for some time dwelt with a

humble but respectable family, was wooed by a substantial farmer in the neighbourhood. She likewise dealt candidly with her suitor, but he was enamoured of her, he vowed that he would never allude reproachfully to the past, and she became his wife. We believe that neither the tradesmen in Ireland nor the farmer in England have had any reason to repent of the marriages which they thus contracted.

Mr. Shadbolt and Madame Angelique were duly tried for the forgeries of which they had been guilty, and were condemned to transportation. Vain was it that the male prisoner proclaimed himself to be of so excellent a character that he was invariably known amongst his acquaintances as " honest Ike Shadbolt; " vain likewise was it that Madame Angelique went into hysterics and besought the tribunal to have mercy upon a poor friendless Frenchwoman. The evidence was conclusive against them, and they were shipped off to the penal colonies.

We should not omit to state that the Viscount and Viscountess Delorme have occasionally visited England to pass a few weeks with their friends Lord and Lady Octavian Meredith, and that they enjoy the completest happiness. Monsieur Volney died at Madrid, about a year after his daughter's marriage, but Zoe has ever religiously respected the tremendous secret which he revealed to her with regard to the Alpine tragedy.

Mr. Armytage faithfully followed the counsel given to him by Mr. Coleman and Queen Indora to abstain from future speculations. He did not, however, long survive the tremendous incidents at Oaklands; he died suddenly, of a disease of the heart, and neither his daughter nor his son-in-law had ever the slightest reason to suspect that he had been for so many years acquainted with the fearful guilt of the late Duke of Marchmont, — indeed, from the very night of its perpetration, as recorded in the earliest chapters of our history.

Jane Barclay, no longer " Crazy Jane," but a rational, sane, and happy woman, presides as housekeeper over the domestic affairs of the mansion in Belgrave Square. It was at her own request that Christian gave her this post, for it would have better suited his inclinations and those of his amiable sister Christina to have placed in an independent and affluent position the faithful creature whose devotion

to the memory of her former mistress had been for a long series of years attended with such melancholy influences for herself. But Jane Barclay desired to dwell beneath the same roof with the son of the deceased Duchess Eliza, and we need hardly assure the reader that she continues to be the object of the most friendly feelings on the part of the twins whom she so dearly loves.

THE END.